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DEATH BE NOT PROUD

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ELIZABETH NICHOLAS

Death be not Proud



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FOR MIRANDA, MY DAUGHTER

*Thou, therefore, for whom they died
Seek not thine own*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

THE NAMES OF many people who helped me in the writing of this book are mentioned in the text; to them, and to those few who preferred to remain anonymous, I owe a heavy debt of gratitude.

In particular, I am deeply indebted to the close relations of the women who form my subject, who talked with me so frankly, and were so interested in my quest, for their understanding and sympathy. I admired them all more than words can tell, and I hope they will find this book not wholly unworthy of its theme. It is not easy to write of nobility and courage in words that are adequate.

If I single out one for special mention, Mrs. Rowden, it is because, as the mother of Diana Rowden, who was my friend, the book started with her. Had I not known Diana, I would never have written it; and during the three years I have worked on it, Mrs. Rowden has shown constant, affectionate, and sensitive interest in my progress. I salute her now.

I would wish, also, to emphasize the very deep respect I feel for the work done by Miss Vera Atkins; her personal contribution to French Section, S.O.E., was, I am convinced, unsurpassed.

I am indebted also to Messrs. William Hodge & Co. Ltd., for permission to quote from the Introduction to *The Natzweiler Trial*, edited by Anthony M. Webb, M.A., F.R.S.A., and to the Editor of *The Times* for permission to quote from that journal.

The other books I have consulted are mentioned in the text; some, unfortunately, are now out of print. I would like to explain that Jean Overton Fuller's book *Madeleine*, the story of Noor Inayat Khan, was republished as a Pan book in 1957 under the title *Born for Sacrifice*; I refer to it throughout by its original title of *Madeleine*. Miss Fuller's second book, *The Starr Affair*, has been reissued in a Panther edition. Both works I have found extremely valuable.

The Honorary officials and staff of *Libre Résistance* in Paris, the *Amicale* of those who worked in S.O.E. *Réseaux*, have taken much

trouble to help me, and to them, too, I give grateful thanks. Their willing assistance was a welcome contrast to the shut doors I found in London. .

I have to thank the next of kin in each case for permission to reproduce photographs of the principal characters in this book. The remaining plates are reproduced by permission of the Editor of the *Sunday Pictorial*, to whom I am also indebted.

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PROLOGUE

THIS IS A BOOK about seven women who served with the French Section of the Special Operations Executive, were captured by the Germans, and put to death in a manner shameful to their captors, yet ennobled by the courage with which it was endured.

I wrote the book because one of these women, Diana Rowden, was a friend of mine, a girl with whom I was at school. I knew nothing about the other six, beyond the names of five that were listed, together with that of Diana Rowden, by Jerrard Tickell in his book, *Odette*, as having travelled with Mrs. Churchill¹ from Fresnes to Karlsruhe Prison in May 1944. They were Vera Leigh, Andrée Borrell,² Madeleine Damerment, Eliane Plewman and Yolande Beekman.

The seventh girl was a mysterious unknown, a woman who had been murdered at Natzweiler Concentration Camp with Diana Rowden, Vera Leigh and Andrée Borrell in July 1944. At the trial of those who encompassed these murders, the British authorities admitted they had been unable to identify the fourth woman who had been put to death, though it had been clearly established that four had died. I was, in the course of my researches, able to identify her some twelve years later as Sonia Olschanesky.

For three years I was absorbed in the task of tracing the story of these seven women; I lived with it and for it, and my researches took me to points as far afield as Madrid and Tett nang, hard by Lake Constance. At Tett nang I met a man vital to my story, Hugo Bleicher, *alias*

¹ Since I started writing this book, Mrs. Churchill has become Mrs. Hallowes. As 'Odette' is, however, widely known as Mrs. Churchill, I have taken the liberty of thus referring to her.

² In the many documents I consulted that referred to Andrée Borrell, her name was spelt sometimes with one l, sometimes with two. On the back of a photograph supplied by her sister, Madame Arend, the name was spelt Borrell, and I assumed, therefore, that this was correct. When this book was in the press, I discovered my assumption was wrong: the correct spelling was Borrel. Unfortunately it was too late to make the necessary correction throughout the text.

Colonel Henri, lately of that Branch of the Security Forces of the German Wehrmacht that was concerned with counter-espionage. In France, I was to meet many people who had suffered deeply as a result of his activities.

In those three years I wrote, too, some 650 letters in search of information; travelled over Britain as well as Europe; met scores of people. I wrote this book as my researches progressed; and because I lived so closely with the matters that are its subject, I may, in my writing, sometimes have presumed in the reader a familiarity with my theme that he cannot, in fact, possess.

When it was finished, however, I was reluctant to re-write in the light of subsequently acquired knowledge; for better or worse, I wanted the book to stand as it was written, to be an honest account of a quest. The alternative was to draw, in a prologue, the strategic background against which the seven women worked, to place the picture in perspective. This I would now do.

Six of the women whose story I tell were trained by S.O.E. in England, and subsequently dropped by parachute, or landed from a Lysander, in France, at different dates between September 1942 and February 1944. All were taken by the Germans after varying periods; imprisoned in Fresnes and Karlsruhe, and murdered in two groups, in July and September 1944.¹ The seventh, Sonia Olschansky, was a girl of Russian extraction living in France, who joined an S.O.E. circuit in Paris, and was captured in January 1944. She suffered the same fate.

In the summer of 1955, when I began my investigations, I knew nothing about French Section, S.O.E., beyond what had been published in books that were, without exception, in the form of success stories. I was not so naïve as to believe that secret service, in all its forms, was carried out by knights in shining armour: but I had no conception of what lay behind the glistening façade built up by the books I had read.

Very soon I realized that many strange events were hidden by this façade; as time went by, I came to the conclusion that each one of the seven women whose story I was seeking had been betrayed, and that the man behind their betrayals was, in most cases, Hugo Bleicher.

¹ I hold that these women were murdered, in that they were given no trial, permitted no defence, the method of execution was barbaric, and that four of them did not even know they were about to die. I would not dispute that their activities could, after a properly conducted trial, have warranted a death sentence.

Yet Bleicher was no more than an N.C.O. in the Abwehr, in the department dealing with counter-espionage. As he has made clear in his own book of memoirs, *Colonel Henri's Story*, the German Intelligence services were as occupied in fighting each other as they were in frustrating the Allies. Yet he did great damage to the Allied cause.

To make the background clear, the Abwehr was the successor of the old Military Intelligence Service of the German War Ministry; from 1938 it was known as the Security Offices: Amtsgroupe Abwehr. It was organized in five departments and sub-departments; Bleicher belonged to Branch III F, which employed foreign agents. Its task was to penetrate the ranks of foreign secret services; it penetrated a number of French Section, S.O.E. Resistance groups, and for what went on in Holland I recommend the reader to *London Calling North Pole*. . . .

The Abwehr was, however, only one side of the medal, and the less-tarnished side. There was also the Reich Security Office, or R.S.H.A., which controlled the police; Military Intelligence had no powers to prosecute civilian suspects. It had to act through the R.S.H.A., and that meant the Gestapo, so far as the activities of spies and agents were concerned.

Its full name was the Geheime Staatspolizei, which was changed in 1939 to Reichs Sicherheits Haupt Amt, or Reich Central Security Office; the Gestapo remained a branch of it.

By an agreement reached between Canaris, acting as head of the Abwehr, and Heydrich, representing the police, the Abwehr operated the secret services abroad and military counter-espionage, but the police had sole control in all prosecutions arising out of information lodged by the armed services.¹

This agreement had important consequences for all those members of S.O.E. who were taken by the enemy; many of them were, in the event, detected and arrested by the Abwehr, but this organization was obliged to hand them over, sooner or later, to the Gestapo.

It is fair to add that, so far as my knowledge goes, the Abwehr did not torture its prisoners; that function was the preserve of the Gestapo, to whom the Abwehr delivered its victims.

I now believe that the first vital penetration of S.O.E. by the Abwehr was in the autumn of 1941, when a very remarkable woman, Mathilde Carron, known as La Chatte, was arrested. Since I started writing this story, her story has been told by Gordon Young in *The Cat with Two Faces*.

Faces. She was a member of a very early Resistance group, Inter-Allied, founded by some Polish officers stranded in France after the defeat of 1940; it did excellent work, sending Intelligence reports of the utmost importance to London.

When La Chatte was arrested, she spent one night in prison, decided it was not the place for her, and agreed to work for the Germans. She immediately became the mistress of Bleicher, and betrayed her loyal comrades with a wholly revolting enthusiasm. She was then installed in an establishment that acquired the nickname 'The Cattery', where she continued to work her radio, sending German-inspired messages to London. It has been suggested that the *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst* slipped through the Channel because London (throughout I use 'London' as a generic term to cover all Intelligence H.Q. situated there) preferred to believe her reports (hitherto very reliable), which stressed that both warships were incapable of putting to sea, rather than those sent by agents working for the separate de Gaulle Resistance groups, which were, at the same time, full of urgent warning that the departure of the ships from Brest was imminent.

At the end of December 1941, shortly after her change of allegiance, a very unfortunate chain of events brought La Chatte into contact with one 'Lucas', an officer of French Section, S.O.B. As a result, messages to his H.Q. in London were sent through her German-controlled radio set; this story is fully told by Gordon Young. I would make it clear that 'Lucas' was the victim of mischance; his own integrity is not questioned.

Ultimately, London sent a naval craft to pick up Lucas and La Chatte and bring them to England, where they arrived in February 1942. La Chatte was subsequently imprisoned in Holloway and Aylesbury. She spent seven years in prison in Britain and France before she was brought to trial in Paris; she was then condemned to death, but the sentence was commuted to one of life imprisonment in May 1949. In the summer of 1954, after a total period of imprisonment stretching over twelve years, she was released.

Thus, through the unwitting agency of 'Lucas', Bleicher gained contact with a Resistance group operated in France by S.O.B. Fifteen months later he was to arrest Odette and Peter Churchill; another French traitor then entered the picture: Roger Bardet. This man had worked for the Churchills and, when arrested, he chose the same path as La Chatte: he chose to sell his honour for his life, and worked therefore

Bardet's original chief had been a French officer, Henri Frager, second in command of a large Resistance group called Carte, with H.Q. in the South of France. French Section, S.O.E., had had contact with this group through Lieutenant François Basin, code name Olive, who was taken to France secretly by ship from Gibraltar in the late summer of 1941, charged with the task of building up Resistance groups in south-eastern France.

In March 1942 Olive was joined by Peter Churchill, who reported favourably on the Carte organization; nevertheless, care was taken to keep the S.O.E. network entirely separate from that of Carte, whose security was lamentable. In June 1942 Carte agreed to send one of his officers to London, so that a basis for closer collaboration might be worked out; this officer was Henri Frager, and the story of his clandestine flight to London has been told by Peter Churchill, who accompanied him.

Frager was a man of integrity and great courage; but he was not, perhaps, by the very reason of his honest, straightforward character, entirely fitted for the task of leading a great group of underground agents. Nevertheless, his personality impressed London; and it was decided that support should be given to Carte. Frager returned to France from England in August 1942, accompanied by Peter Churchill, who was to take over from Olive. Olive had, however, been arrested ten days before.

The next six months were, it seems, chaotic; and in January 1943 the Carte organization was rent from top to bottom by internal strife. Frager then realized that his position was impossible and, with the approval of Peter Churchill, he flew again to London to make fresh plans. It was then decided that the Carte organization should be divided into three parts, two of which should be under the command of British officers of S.O.E., and the third, stretching from Châlons-sur-Saône to Paris and eastward to Nancy, under Frager.

He returned again to France in April 1943, and assumed command of the group that had the code names 'Donkeyman' in London, 'Jean Marie' in France. When he made yet another visit to London in the autumn of 1943, he was able to report the creation of Resistance groups over a great area of France, which had been armed with the fruit of nineteen parachute drops, 247 containers in all.

Unfortunately, Roger Bardet had, as I have said, worked with Frager; and in April 1943 Bardet had gone over to the enemy. As a result, Bleicher was put in contact with Frager; to him he told

substantially the same story he had told Odette Churchill. Masquerading under the name of Colonel Henri, he announced himself as an anti-Hitler officer, secretly working for Allied victory. Frager believed this; he had frequent meetings with Bleicher, and told him much about his organization. Ultimately, Frager was himself arrested by 'Colonel Henri'; he was murdered in Buchenwald in September 1944, dying of slow strangulation while hanging from a hook with piano wire round his neck.

Now we come to the pith of this matter. One of the women of my story, Vera Leigh, was Frager's courier; she was denounced to Bleicher by Bardet. Another, Andrée Borrell, was courier to a British officer 'Prosper' (whose story I tell in the course of this book), who was also in touch with Frager, and who was certainly betrayed. Another, Yolande Beekman, worked for an officer called Guy Bieler, who was in turn in contact with Prosper. Yet another, Madeleine Damerment, dropped straight to a German reception committee; her reception had been arranged, so London thought, by a French officer, Captain Garry (also murdered in Buchenwald), but he had in fact been arrested by the Germans months before. Captain Garry had as his radio operator Noor Inayat Khan, who had originally been radio operator to Prosper; after her arrest in October 1943, the Germans captured her W/T apparatus and codes, and for many months sent false messages to London in her name. They called this the 'radio game'. Arrangements for Madeleine Damerment's drop into France were made between London on the one hand and Noor Inayat Khan's German controlled W/T set on the other.

Sonia Olschansky worked for a Resistance group that was also in contact with Prosper, and her chief had worked for the group to which La Chatte belonged. Eliane Plewman worked in Marseilles for a group that had been initiated by Captain S. C. Jones, who had acted as a liaison officer to Henri Frager. Captain Jones had as his W/T operator a Lieutenant Clech, and later worked in close contact with Vera Leigh in Paris.

Thus six of the women are clearly linked, and linked, also, with Roger Bardet and Bleicher and with the captured radio sets that were worked back so successfully by the Germans. There remains Diana Rowden, with whom this book began: and she too was arrested as a result of the 'radio game'. German security forces were led to her by a French traitor, impersonating an S.O.E. officer, who, in his turn, had been arrested immediately on his arrival in France. When arranging

his reception, as they thought, with French patriots, London H.Q. had in fact been arranging it with the Germans. On arrest, he revealed his contacts; as I have said, a French traitor impersonated him for the final act of the tragedy.

Diana worked, moreover, for a group that had connections with the group to which Sonia Olschansky belonged, and in territory where Roger Bardet operated.

I think there can be no doubt therefore that all seven women were betrayed by the 'radio game' or through Bleicher and his band of traitors. And should any reader wonder how it was possible that so many groups, involving so many people, that should have been entirely watertight were in fact integrated to a degree where penetration of one meant penetration of all, I can only say I wonder too.

The answer, I think, may lie to some extent through the weakness of the W/T side of operations; as arrests were made, group leaders, left without communications, sent their messages through operators belonging to other circuits. Guy Bieler, in St. Quentin, for example, for some time had to send his messages through Prosper. I would add that this was not because his own operator was arrested, but because on arrival in France he proved entirely incompetent. . . .

Prosper had, in his turn, been given members of the Carte organization as his original contacts . . . and so the business went on. In retrospect, the interdependence of these groups was terrifying; and it had terrifying consequences.

The terrifying consequences are the sinews of this book. If it be asked what purpose is served by pulling aside even a small portion of the façade that has been woven over French Section, S.O.E., revealing a different backcloth, I would answer that I believe truth and justice always have value and that the attempt to preserve unblemished a glossy surface of unspotted brilliance has led to injustice. No official objection—quite the contrary—has been made to the publication of stories of those who returned alive when the war ended; the War Office gave much assistance to Jerrard Tickell when he was writing *Odette*. Every obstacle is now placed in the way of those who wish to write of the unlucky ones—those who lost their lives when serving with French Section, S.O.E.: those whose story, if published, would be painted in more sombre colours. The seven women of this book fall into that category.

I must also make it clear here that it has proved impossible to reconstruct the story of each one of them in a manner that bears any relation

to coherence or continuity. In spite of all my efforts, I have been quite unable to collect more than a fragment of the story of each; and I have been determined not to reconstruct in my own imagination the missing elements. I have, therefore, told each bit of the story as I myself uncovered it; this has seemed the only method open to me.

So far as I know, only two books have hitherto been written about women who died when serving with French Section, S.O.E.: *Madeleine*, by Jean Overton Fuller, which is the story of Noor Inayat Khan, G.C., and *Carve Her Name with Pride*, by R. J. Minney, the story of Violette Szabo, G.C.

Noor Inayat Khan worked in the field for about five months before her arrest, and though Miss Fuller persevered with the utmost diligence and extraordinary ingenuity to piece together the history of these months, as she herself clearly states, her record was, in the end, only fragmentary. Violette Szabo worked in the field for a total period amounting roughly to three weeks before her arrest, so the task of Mr. Minney was simplified. But I sought to trace the story of seven women, some of whom operated underground for long periods—Andrée Borrell worked for nine months—and I must admit that I too have failed to gather together more than a series of incidents in their careers in France.

I have, however, I think, discovered enough to prove their courage and fortitude and I hope that the reader will agree with me that in writing of these matters it is essential to be factual. It would have been easy enough to write the story in a form that would, in effect, have been semi-fiction; to have constructed, from a chance snatch of remembered conversation, long dialogues; to have invented, on the basis of hypothesis, events for which no real evidence existed that they had ever in fact taken place; to have put in the mouths and minds of people long since dead words and thoughts they might well have spoken or entertained, but which would, if put in print, be no more than the purest invention.

Reading some books about, or by, those who survived, I have been astonished by the facility they reveal for retaining in the memory, over long periods of years, great slabs of detailed dialogue. This facility was even more remarkable when the dialogues in question took place between two people, both dead, whom the author had never met.

I do not wish to seem cantankerous. I will simply repeat that I have felt it best not to be lured into the entrancing glades of semi-fiction; I have recorded nothing in this book as having happened unless it were

reported to me on first-hand evidence; conjecture, possibility, unsubstantiated theories are clearly stated as being such.

This story of seven women should not, therefore, be regarded as an essay in biography; it is rather the story of a quest that can never have final ending: an attempt to reveal, in small measure, some of the sacrifices that were made for us that we have never had opportunity to acknowledge.

I have written, often, compelled by anger, by deep emotion, by compassion. I do not apologize for this, for I was writing of lives, some of them barely stretched to maturity, that were sacrificed that we might these ten years later occupy ourselves with all the richly assorted material that makes our world.

It is not, I think, for me to shrug my shoulders and accept with cool detachment the gift of lives spent that I might reap the benefit. But I would not wish it to be thought that I attach blame to those who directed the spending of those lives, that they were cool and detached. The burden of my complaint, if indeed I make complaint, is that they were insufficiently imbued with ruthless efficiency.

I have already outlined the extraordinary laxity of organization, whereby one group overlapped with another. Remember, too, that Lucas came to London early in 1943, and was able to give a full report on Bleicher. His importance in the German counter-security forces must have been appreciated: but it would seem impossible that agents received any briefing about him, or any warning. In April 1943 he presented himself to Odette Churchill as Colonel Henri; she reported this meeting to London, was told Henri was highly dangerous, that she was to have no more to do with him, that her group should disperse. Yet throughout that same summer Henri Frager was in close contact with the same Colonel Henri, whom he believed to be genuinely anti-Nazi, and to whom he, unwittingly, betrayed his vast network. Did London not connect Odette Churchill's Colonel Henri with Frager's Colonel Henri? If not, what deplorable inefficiency. If it did, why was not Frager warned before he laid his far-spreading circuits in Bleicher's hands?¹

I have in my possession an objective appreciation of some aspects of the functioning of S.O.E., prepared for me by a friend infinitely more informed on the subject of Intelligence work than I can ever hope to be. He gave me this when I began the investigations that form this book;

¹ It might be that he was warned, but had so little regard for his superiors in London that he took no heed.

it has been in my mind throughout the writing of it. In particular, this passage has dominated my thoughts:

'Intelligence organizations should pick and train their agents to do one job, and one job only. Agents should be absolutely forbidden to touch anything that does not directly concern that job. If a new angle arises, the agent should inform his H.Q., but no more. The H.Q. would then, if it thought it necessary, send another agent to deal with the new issue. Interlapping is fatal. This very necessary lesson was not, it seems, ever learned by S.O.E.

'Its major failure was its failure to restrict the activity of individual agents within possible margins. They should never have been permitted to become involved in any schemes not directly connected with their own work, nor with any group outside it. Every additional contact multiplied by square-law the risk of discovery. Some S.O.E. agents, for example, became involved in escape routes, in the passing out of France of agents, belonging to other circuits, who were on the run. Sentiment may have suggested they should be permitted this activity; ruthless efficiency should have forbidden it.¹

'An Intelligence organization has to be inhumanely cold-blooded to be efficient. S.O.E. never seems to have had the courage to be so; if it had, a lot of lives might have been saved.

'To pass from the heroic to the comic, it may be remembered that Elizabeth Taylor, when in hospital in Denmark shortly after her marriage to Michael Wilding, made ingenuous plaint that the American film company by which she was employed telephoned her husband every morning to ask: "How's our little investment today?"

'That is the precisely proper attitude of an Intelligence organization towards its agents. A large number of people have spent a lot of valuable time and money in training the agent; one aircrew and aircraft (often more, if more than one attempt to infiltrate has to be made) have been risked in dropping him. Replacing him will be a slow, expensive and risky job. He is an investment that must return dividends in the form of information, of work done. Imprisoned or dead, he is a total loss of capital. The value of this capital investment has to be weighed carefully against the potential value of every action he is asked to undertake that may involve risks beyond the normal measure. As an attitude it is completely cold and impersonal, but in fact it safeguards the agent.

¹ See p. 87.

'One cannot help concluding that S.O.E. agents were frequently called upon to undertake missions involving a risk far beyond the potential value of the work they might perform or the information they might obtain.'

This exposé of the correct attitude of an H.Q. towards its agents in the field was before me always as I wrote; lest I may be misunderstood in some things I have written, I would emphasize that it has never been my intention to suggest that those who directed S.O.E. from London were reprehensible in that they were not swayed by pity or compassion, nor paid heed to the inevitably tragic consequences of failure. If anything, it might be argued that they were influenced too much by emotion in their judgment of men and of women, their character and ability, in the demands made upon them: that, as amateurs in the realm of Intelligence, they lacked the ruthless application of the professional.

There is another sphere, too, in which I have felt the organization was culpable: I condemn what I conceive to be the indifference, the negligence, with which the next of kin of those who died were too often treated. The defence may be made, has been made, that these men and women were employed on secret service, that the circumstances of their work and death must remain secret too. But this is not a valid argument.

The men and women who went to France for S.O.E. were not secret agents in the usual sense of the term. Very often, their relations knew, before they went, what manner of work they were about to undertake. Once in France this work, unlike that of the genuine spy, was common knowledge to many ordinary French people, a number of whom still live today, and talk and remember. They were known, openly, as British officers who had come to give support to the Resistance.

After death, some information was sent to some relatives; others received virtually none. But the war had barely ended, when permission was given for books about S.O.E., written by or about those who came home, to be published. This fact, combined with the circumstance that a fair measure of information was given to some relations, demolishes the argument that the work of S.O.E. was in its entirety secret, and must remain so.

My case is that some relatives were left in a state of intolerable anguish and uncertainty for no other reason than that it was the duty of no one to clear up the aftermath of the activities of S.O.E. No

security was involved; it was, simply, that no one was required to accept responsibility. The curtain was rung down on a rather squalid stage-set, and the lights extinguished; perhaps it was thought undesirable that critics of the production should be allowed to poke around in the wings and peer behind that glistening back-cloth.

The R.A.F. took an infinity of trouble, and rightly, to trace aircrew missing from operations; the search went on for years. But S.O.E. was wound up with indecent haste, its personnel demobilized, its archives gutted and committed to cellars where none might see them, the loose ends were left to trail for ever their dusty tails in the attics of memory. No one, in some cases, sought even to discover how S.O.E. agents had been captured or betrayed; not even for the strictly realistic purpose of learning lessons that might be useful another time. The drama had ended in France; it was for no one to wind up the production either for business purposes or for the humane purpose of presenting, at long last, truth to mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, who had for too long been pierced by the anguish of unknowing.

I do not believe that the men and women of S.O.E. meant more to their relations, nor deserved more of their country, than did missing aircrew of the R.A.F. But, as personified by the seven women of this book, did they not mean as much, and deserve as much?

NOTE. A great many agents are mentioned in the course of this book, all of whom had a variety of names: code names, cover names, documentary names, names used for security when in this country, and so on. To avoid confusion, a complete cross-referenced list of agents is given in the appendix on page 285.

CHAPTER I

WHEN I DECIDED, in the early summer of 1955, to write, if I could, this book I knew very little indeed about the French Section of the Special Operations Executive; what little I did know was mostly gained from works that shed, shall I say, a somewhat rosy light on its activities. They did, indeed, contain terrible passages that recorded human endurance and fortitude stretched to their utmost capacity; but they placed in the mind of the reader no doubts as to the brilliance of the direction of the enterprise, no suspicion that terrible blunders might have been made. In a sense, these books, unwittingly no doubt, seemed to reduce the task of S.O.E. to the jolly realms of cops and robbers; there was little, nothing, in them of treachery and corruption and the idiot root in man that can reduce him to the status of a sheep.

During the war, it is true, my work in a department of the Foreign Office brought me in contact, very remotely and at a properly subservient level, with S.O.E. and its headquarters in Baker Street. I was concerned only with the Balkans, but it occurred to me that if such things were afoot in Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece, it was probable that agents were at work, too, in other Occupied territories.

One did not, however, speculate; those of us on the fringe of these mysteries held the Organization in proper respect, and were acutely conscious that all must be enshrouded in secrecy; I knew nothing of what might be going on, specifically, in France. Indeed, I remember well a stinging rebuke I received for what was conceived as a breach of security. I was sitting alone in a room in a building then occupied by a section of the Foreign Office, and subject to powerful guard. A colleague, an officer in the Intelligence Corps, came in hot, I understood, from Baker Street, and proceeded to entertain me with some choice morsels of gossip. Innocently, I asked: 'Did you get that from S.O.E.?'

He looked nervously round the empty room, and then hissed at me, in a voice charged with angry rebuke: 'Never mention that name again, ever. . . .'

Tiens, I said to myself, properly ashamed of my foolish feminine tongue.

Remembering this episode, I was a little astonished by a story told me by a friend shortly after I had returned from the Middle East in 1945. 'You know,' she said, 'the oddest thing. When I had that flat in Kensington in 1943, a friend of X's used to come and spend the night sometimes. She made something of a mystery of herself, and said she was training to be dropped in France, by parachute, as an agent. Didn't believe a word of it. Then one day she came and said she was just off; she hadn't any relations in England, and would like to have some sort of link with the home front, as it were. Would I mind if she gave my name—I would get letters from time to time to let me know if she was still alive and kicking.

'Well, I still didn't believe a word of it, but I said, "Yes". Why not after all? And blow me,' said this friend, 'it was perfectly true. She *was* parachuted into France, I did get letters from some W.O. department or other, and she had told me about it quite openly and casually before she went.'¹

Thus was I shriven of my guilt complex for having mentioned the letters S.O.E. to an officer in the Intelligence Corps in a room in a heavily guarded Foreign Office Department. Some people, I concluded, carried security a step less far. This view was reinforced ten years later, when I realized that many friends and relations of S.O.E. agents had known all about it; one, indeed, told me he had had a gay farewell dinner with a woman agent the night before she left for France. She was one of those who did not return.

I knew no more about the French Section of S.O.E., beyond what I had read in George Millar's book, *Maquis*, which did not reveal that he had in fact worked for S.O.E. at all, until in May 1948 I read in *The Times* that a memorial had been unveiled in St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, in honour of those members of the F.A.N.Y. Corps who had lost their lives in the war. One of them was a girl with whom I had been at school—Diana Rowden.

I remember that day very well; I was in Morayshire, and it was a cool, golden spring morning which, only three years after the end of the war in Europe, still had power to move the heart with thankfulness that it was there to be enjoyed in peace.

I remembered Diana as I had known her; one of the most diffident, most reticent people I had ever met. Of medium height, pale

¹ She did not come back.

complexion, reddish hair, with very clear, reflective eyes. She had hated school, I remembered, and its restrictions; she was of it, but never part of it. She was, I thought sixteen years later, too mature for us. We were still schoolgirls in grubby white blouses concerned with games and feuds and ha-ha jokes. She was already adult, and withdrawn from our diversions; none of us, I think, ever knew her. And yet I remembered her with great clarity, though we had met only occasionally after she left school. Perhaps, even then, the seeds of the courage that was to ripen in war were already in her, and were unconsciously made manifest to us.

This I cannot say; but I was, that May day in 1948, astonished to read that she had been parachuted into enemy-occupied France and had died in German hands. That was something unforeseen, and unattended; for it seemed to me then, as indeed it seems to me now, that such cold-blooded acceptance of danger and the probability of atrocious death called for a stubborn fibre such as it had not occurred to me Diana might possess. I remember very well throwing down *The Times* in a sudden spurt of anger. I was still young enough to be disturbed if time proved me wrong in judgment.

Recently, I looked up that cutting from *The Times*. It fills half a column, and the prose is in the best *Times* tradition; lucid, simple and touched, here and there, with an emotion made more poignant by restraint:

This is what, in part, it said:

'Some of the bravest figures of the war are commemorated among the names of fifty-two women to whose memory a modest tablet was unveiled yesterday by Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone, Commandant-in-Chief of the Women's Transport Service, at St. Paul's Church, Knightsbridge.

'The fifty-two are those members of the W.T.S. (which began in 1907 as the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry) who fell in different theatres of the war. . . . Of these women and girls, thirteen met death in German prison camps, after having been parachuted into enemy-occupied territory as secret agents to serve the Allies by aiding the resistance movements. Some were tortured after capture in the hope of extracting information; some were shot; some died in gas-chambers. There is no formula by which to calculate how much of cold courage was embodied in these thirteen women, or what they endured in dying for their countries. Their names are:

'Mrs. Yolande Beekman, Croix de Guerre, 32
 Miss Daniclle Bloch, 29
 Miss Andrée Borrell, 24
 Miss Muriel Byck, 26
 Miss Madeleine Damerment, 26
 Miss Norah Inayat Khan, G.C., Croix de Guerre, 29
 Mrs. Cecily M. Lefort, 44
 Miss Vera E. Leigh, 41
 Mrs. Eliane Plewman, Croix de Guerre, 26
 Miss Lilian Rolfe, 30
 Miss Diana Rowden, 29
 Mrs. Yvonne Rudellat, 48
 Mrs. Violette Szabo, G.C., 24

'The tablet is on an outside wall of the church in a quiet corner of Wilton Place, away from the bustle of Knightsbridge. The Vicarage, the next building, served as F.A.N.Y. headquarters during the war.

'... There were passages in the service which seemed more than usually applicable to the particular occasion—sentences that awakened far but clear echoes of adventures and exploits among the most desperate of the war. The lesson was from the Book of Wisdom: "But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and there shall no torment touch them. . . . For God proved them, and found them worthy of Himself. As gold in the furnace hath he tried them."

'The congregation knelt as the choir sang the Contakion of the Faithful Departed—"Give rest, O Christ, to thy servants with thy saints, where sorrow and pain are no more." The vicar, the Rev. E. B. Henderson, spoke from the text, "Their name liveth for evermore." He quoted the words that one of the dead women is remembered to have used: "I would do anything for England." The last hymn was Cecil Spring-Rice's:

*I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love.*

'The final act was with a drummer of the Coldstream Guards sounding Last Post. . . .'

I read this in the library of the Imperial War Museum one hot morning in June 1955. As I had walked through the galleries, on my way to the library, I had passed two youths of around fifteen or sixteen years, I judged, who were examining minutely a model of a

minesweeper. One of them had said to the other, 'D'you remember any bombs, Dick?' And his friend replied: 'Too young, worse luck.'

'Worse luck'; well, that was one way to remember war, I thought, as I sat in the library. One of the excellent librarians had given me a bunch of cuttings referring to the unveiling of the F.A.N.Y. memorial, and some of them gave more personal details than had *The Times*. The *Evening News* report, for example, included this paragraph:

'Miss Vera Leigh, a British girl in a Paris fashion house before the war, was burned alive in a crematorium at Natzweiler with Borrell and Rowden. . . . Miss Rowden, wireless operator, went long distances in dangerous country to maintain liaison with various groups and once escaped after being arrested.'

I knew, when I read that cutting, in what manner Diana Rowden had been put to death; but the words, cold in print, 'burned alive in a crematorium', still had power to shock almost beyond endurance. As I sat, surrounded by the comfortable, kindly backcloth of many books, my thoughts turned towards those who had loved Vera Leigh, Diana Rowden, Andrée Borrell; father, mother, sister, brother. . . . If knowledge that death had come thus to a friend could pierce me with so sharp a sword, how infinitely greater the anguish for the mother who had given her birth, the brother who had shared with her the warm, encircled safety of a nursery. . . .

The story of that crime, atrocious, barbaric, evil beyond reckoning, was told in the report of the Natzweiler Trial, published in 1949 by William Hodge in his War Crimes Trial series. There I had read the story in all its horror; for the trial was concerned with those who had encompassed these murders, and treated them casually as an incident in the day's work, as matters that might be put out of the mind as soon as the light was turned out, and that day finished and done.

I knew, then, of the wickedness of Natzweiler; and I was puzzled by that cutting in the *Evening News*. For I knew, too, that at the Natzweiler Trial, held at Wuppertal in May-June 1946, the names of the murdered women, the officers of S.O.E., had been suppressed by the Press, acting on the request of the competent authorities. It was put then to the Press representatives covering the trial that to publish the names would cause distress to the next of kin, who had asked that they should be withheld. The Press agreed; though one correspondent, a woman, has since told me she had come to regret this.

Yet these names, suppressed in 1946, were made public in 1948 at

the time of the unveiling of the F.A.N.Y. memorial; and, a year later, the whole story was given, with all the hideous details, in the War Crimes series. In it there were even published photographs of Vera Leigh, of Diana Rowden, of Andrée Borrell. . . .

This I could not understand; it seemed very perverse. It is less comprehensible still today, when I know from the sister of Andrée Borrell that she was not approached in the matter and, if she had been, would have wished that the name be published; I know, from Mrs. Rowden herself, that she made no objection to the publication, during the trial, of her daughter's name; and Mr. V. A. D. Clark, who was named by Vera Leigh as her next of kin, told the War Office, before the trial, that he thought it best the names should be published saying that he and the rest of Miss Leigh's family knew the truth and believed little purpose would be served by secrecy.

In 1948, when I learnt from *The Times* that Diana Rowden had during the war been an agent in France, I knew nothing of these matters. I cannot now remember if I read the Press reports of the Natzweiler Trial when it was in progress in 1946; I think it probable I did, but I did not then realize that I had known any of the women concerned in it, for, as I have said, no names were published, and it thus left no imprint on my mind. My next news of Diana's wartime career came in 1949, when the report of the Trial was published; and, in the same year, I read the book *Odette*.

Odette, as a book, I disliked very much; there were many passages whose facetiousness I thought disagreeably ill-timed. What was, one understood, a true story, was written in a style that suggested it was fiction; it simply reeked of the cops and robbers approach to subversive activity. Nevertheless, today I cannot but feel a severe twinge of envy for Jerrard Tickell who, in his preface, gave thanks to the War Office, and to Major Norman Mott in particular, for permitting access to relevant files. The S.O.E. files are, now, deeply buried in the vaults of Whitehall and no writer may so much as put a hand on them.

It was, however, at the beginning of Chapter XXVII of *Odette* that I got my next bit of information about Diana Rowden; in it I read that she had travelled with Mrs. Churchill from Fresnes to Karlsruhe in May 1944. Mr. Tickell described how, on the 12th of that month, Mrs. Churchill was taken from her cell in Fresnes and driven to 84 Avenue Foch, the H.Q. of the Gestapo in Paris. Here she met six—or, as I now believe, seven—other women, all captured members

of French Section, S.O.E. They were: Miss Andrée Borrell ('Denise'—courier and co-organizer), Miss Vera Leigh ('Simone'—courier), Miss Diana Rowden ('Juliette'—courier)—all three destined to die at Natzweiler—and Mrs. Yolande Beckman ('Yvonne'—radio operator), Miss Madeline Damerment ('Martine'—courier) and Mrs. Eliane Plewman ('Gaby'—courier) who, in turn, were to be murdered at Dachau on 13 September 1944.

Mr. Tickell continued: 'The last of the company, Mrs. Odette Sansom ('Lise'—courier) was the only one who had officially been condemned to death and, by a sardonic twist, she was the only one to live.'

In the months that followed my first reading of *Odette* I thought a good deal about the women who had been her companions in Fresnes and Karlsruhe, one of whom had been my friend. *Odette* was, so far as my knowledge went, the first book to have been written about the women of French Section, S.O.E., and from it I got my first glimpse of what Diana Rowden's work had been. But it was, as I now realize, an idea that was far from complete; it was an impression merely, a veneer laid over a world that was in reality dark, devious and confused. It was, in fact, a success story written in what Mr. Ian Colvin has described as a free style, a tribute to one courageous woman. The background to the activities it described was, in many essentials, ignored, and the whole operation reduced to simple elements. This should not, of course, be construed as criticism; I would simply make the point that after reading *Odette* I knew no more about the real working of French Section, S.O.E., than a man would know of British constitutional history after reading a short guide to the Palace of Westminster.

In *Odette* there was no inkling of the cold and dreadful world of subterfuge and deception, treachery and counter-treachery, espionage and counter-espionage in which the agent, in reality, lives: a world in which many strange and devious forces are inextricably interlocked, so that no man may know with certainty where truth may lie.

Odette revealed little of the long, complicated and groping battle fought between the War Office on the one hand and the German security forces on the other; the weaknesses, the errors, the confusions and the betrayals were not mentioned. The story revealed was uncomplicated; it was, as I have said, the story of one woman, and no attempt was made to disentangle the strings that had manipulated her life and led her, ultimately, to the grotesque and mediaeval horrors of Ravensbruck.

Re-reading *Odette* today, I caught in the background of many of the characters who received brief mention in it: Henri Frager, leader of the Resistance group Jean Marie, who was to die horribly in Buchenwald; Marsac, who was tricked into betraying his comrades; Roger Bardet, a conscious traitor, to whom I was ultimately to trace the end of many threads; and Hugo Bleicher who, on an April day in 1943, arrested Odette and Peter Churchill.

I also know now how important Bleicher is to my story; but this was unrevealed to me when I read *Odette* for the first time. The book left me, then, starry-eyed; it also provoked me, rather against my will, into thought. I thought a great deal about the women who had accompanied Odette from Fresnes to Karlsruhe, and I wished I could know more about them, that I could discover something more about the last months of life of Diana Rowden, whom I had known long ago when I was young. On and off, I wished this for six years; it was not until May 1955 that I decided to make it my business to find out and, if I could, to write the story.

I had a week or two before returned from a winter in Australia; I say winter, but in Australia it had been summer, and I was satiated with heat and brown burnt grass and vivid colour. In the Cotswolds all was cool and grey and green, with hills arching proudly above the red-stained earth and the sky washed blue by rain.

All this was grateful to me after six months of heat; the garden at Hidcote, with bluebells growing beside a stream; the almshouses of Chipping Campden seen through the dusk; the gentle quality of rural England, cool, compact and immeasurably old, was soothing after half a year in a country where all is new.

I liked the scent of the damp air of evening, to walk through wet fields, feeling the earth springy beneath my feet. I went to Oddington, to the old church, with its painted frescoes, that I had last visited in 1937 with a friend destined to die, six years later, while serving with the R.A.F. I had a glass of beer in a pub, and I caught a train back to London from Moreton-in-the-Marsh.

I opened a newspaper, and read a notice of the film, *The Dam Busters*, that had just been shown in London; it suggested that it was, perhaps, inopportune to remind the Germans of disaster. I read this as we passed the old, derelict airfield at Moreton; in the years 1940-3, I had listened to the bombers leaving that airfield for Germany and, in the night watches, I had listened for their return.

I did not know then, as I know now, that Diana Rowden had for

months been stationed at Moreton when she was serving as a W.A.A.F. officer. But, by a curious chance, it was as I steamed past the weed-encrusted dispersal bays that I decided to write her story; and, if I could, the story of the other women who had travelled with her from Fresnes to Karlsruhe exactly eleven years before.

Too much, I thought, was being forgotten too quickly; to forgive was one thing, to forget another. And we in Britain had much less to forgive than some people, for we had never been Occupied by the Germans. This immunity we owed to those who had fought for us, above all, to those who had died; I doubted if it was for us to forget so quickly the nightmare of Occupied Europe and the lives that had been cruelly shattered to spare us personal knowledge of that horror.

Only ten years ago; and yet, so much can happen in ten years. The sea moves over the beach and takes with it the last traces of the wreck; the sea picks clean the bones, lying white and gleaming beneath the silent passage of the waves. Seaweed grows across the steel and covers it with gentle fronds; where once there was strength nothing now remains but a dim shape, reflecting twisted through the water when the surface is still and the sunlight meets it hard and clear.

Nothing floats above the sea, but an echo of time remembered, the sudden thoughts that come unwelcome in the night.

CHAPTER II

IT WAS, AS I very quickly discovered, one thing to decide to write the story of six women who had served and died with the French Section, S.O.E., and quite another to put the impulse into effect.

The first, obvious, person to approach was Maurice Buckmaster, who had commanded the Section. I had met him once, the year before, in connection with his work for Fords; I had lunched with him—and a most excellent luncheon it had been—at Dagenham, and afterwards had been shown round the factory.

I had, indeed, mentioned at luncheon that I had known Diana Rowden and had hoped he might perhaps talk about her a little; but in this I was disappointed. Twelve months later, however, I decided that he was the person I must first approach, and in the middle of May I wrote to him. I was also anxious to get in touch with a Miss

V. M. Atkins who, as an officer in the W.A.A.F., had given evidence for the prosecution at Wuppertal, in the course of the Natzweiler Trial.

A very powerful personality indeed is necessary if it is to liberate itself from the hard straightjacket of legal process, and stand revealed in print; the personality of Miss Atkins had thus communicated itself to me and I felt—as time proved, rightly—that here must be a very remarkable woman, and one who could tell me most, if not all, of what I wanted to know, if she should so choose.

I looked up Atkins, V. M., in the London Telephone Directory, and found someone of that name living near Sloane Street; in my letter to Colonel Buckmaster I asked him if this Atkins, Miss V. M., was the Squadron Officer Vera Atkins who had given evidence at Wuppertal.

A little later I got a letter in reply; Colonel Buckmaster had been abroad when I wrote to him, and was just about to set off again for Holland in command of a great caravanserai which included a military band. He told me, however, that he would be happy to help me where he could in giving information about the S.O.E. girls who had worked under his command, and he added that he was glad that Diana Rowden should be remembered. The stories of some others, he said, had to a certain degree eclipsed her magnificent record.

Colonel Buckmaster was then amiable enough to give me the name of the Commandant of the F.A.N.Y. Corps as a source of information, and he also confirmed that Miss V. M. Atkins was indeed the S/O Atkins who had given evidence in the trial. She had moved recently, and he gave me her new address and telephone number.

He ended by inviting me to luncheon with him on his return from Holland; this would be three weeks ahead, and I had to curb my impatience as best I could.

In the meantime, I could write to Atkins, V. M., and did so; a few days later she telephoned me, and I discovered that I had on a number of occasions spoken with her in her present professional capacity; this coincidence seemed to me to augur well, and it was, in fact, the first of many such.

She accepted my invitation to come, at an early date, and dine with me.

Then I wrote to the Commandant of the F.A.N.Y. Corps; after some delay I received from her too a cordial letter offering me all assistance. Unfortunately she was away in Scotland, and could not see me for nearly four weeks; again, I had to curb impatience.

The next step, clearly, was to read everything I could find that had already been written on the French Section, S.O.E.; in this I sought the assistance of the Imperial War Museum and in the cool and sombre surroundings of its library, I re-read some books that I had originally seen when first they were published: *Odette*, by Jerrard Tickell; *Specially Employed*, by Maurice Buckmaster; *Madeleine*, by Jean Overton Fuller; *The White Rabbit* (this was concerned with the de Gaulle organization), by Bruce Marshall; George Millar's *Maquis*; and Peter Churchill's trilogy, *Of Their Own Will*, *Duel of Wits* and *The Spirit in the Cage*.

In this last I found a moving reference to Diana Rowden. Mr. Churchill described how, early in November 1943, he was taken from Fresnes to a Paris office of the Gestapo, in the rue des Saussaies, for interrogation; in fact, he is in slight error here, for Diana was not arrested until the end of November of that year.

No matter; that is a detail. Mr. Churchill was delighted to find himself near Odette and, to quote his words:

'I slipped up close to Odette, and as she spoke to me with her back to the sentry, a girl I had never seen before, but who was patently English to her finger tips, stood between me and the guard so that he could not see my mouth moving. Despite my anxiety not to miss a second of the golden opportunity to speak with Odette, I was nevertheless instinctively conscious of the girl's unselfish act which included a delicacy of feeling that made her turn about and face the German so as not to butt in on our privacy. I could not imagine what this refined creature with reddish hair was doing in our midst. "Who is she?" I asked Odette. "Diana Rowden," she replied, "one of us."

In this passage I sensed, I think, for the first time, something of the quality of Diana Rowden, which soon was to be made clear to me in all its splendour. I was, some months later, to be shown other aspects of this instinctive courtesy, this gentle consideration in circumstances of great stress, for others.

Madame Juif, in whose kitchen Diana was arrested, in whose sitting-room she spent the last free hours of her life on earth, said to me: 'She helped me clean and prepare my vegetables; one could see from her hands that she was unaccustomed to such work, but she insisted on doing it for me.'

Madame Rheithouse, the owner of a small *bistro* and shop in a tiny hamlet set amid the vast curving hills of the Jura, who gave sanctuary to Diana in August 1943, when the Germans were hot on her trail,

said to me: 'She helped me serve in the shop; I knew that she was not accustomed to do such things, *enfin*, she was a woman of refinement and education, but she was without vanity. She helped me in the shop, because she said it would help her not to be bored.'

Without vanity; that was truth, vanity was wholly missing and in its place was a finely tempered pride that accepted in the end stoically all humiliation and pain. This I sensed, even then, when I read Mr. Churchill's paragraphs.

I read, next, some books I had not read before. *Colonel Henri's Story*, by Hugo Bleicher, the servant of the Abwehr who had arrested Odette and Peter Churchill; *Night Drop to Gascony*, by Anne Marie Walters; and *The Starr Affair*, by Jean Overton Fuller.¹

I had missed the publication of *The Starr Affair* the previous autumn, being then on my way to Australia. I read it with great attention, for it revealed that Diana had been courier to John Starr, and here was the first living contact I had found with her time in France.

The book itself barely mentioned her; it said merely that London sent out a girl to act as a courier to Starr. She arrived safely and was soon a very great help to the group. Her code name was Pauline,¹ and her real name was Diana Rowden.

Later, there was a brief passage which indicated that Diana had been arrested in November 1943, and was brought to the Avenue Foch, where Starr himself was then under detention.

The last time she was mentioned was in a paragraph describing the arrival at the Avenue Foch of a party of women prisoners from Fresnes. Starr went in to see them, and gave them some chocolate; Odette and Diana Rowden were amongst them.

This, of course, was the occasion described by Jerrard Tickell in *Odette*, which had first awakened my curiosity.

I found *The Starr Affair* deeply disturbing, for it dropped some of the scales from my eyes; *Colonel Henri's Story*, inaccurate though it might be, removed many more.

For the first time, as I sat in the library of the Imperial War Museum, I realized that we had not, on our side, been uniformly heroic, unyielding, unbreakable under torture; that those who directed, from afar, operations in the field had not been supermen, incapable of error. It is, perhaps, something of a tribute to the success stories whose pages I had read with such avid interest, that they had lulled my reason into accepting the belief that they were.

¹ In fact, Paulette.

The author of *The Starr Affair*, Jean Overton Fuller, whom I have subsequently met on a number of occasions, had been the friend of Noor Inayat Khan, G.C., an heroic member of S.O.E. who was murdered brutally at Dachau. Miss Fuller had set herself the task of writing her biography, which, under the title *Madeleine*, achieved a great success. In the course of her researches while writing this book, Miss Fuller had learnt of the existence of a Captain John Starr, also an agent of S.O.E., who had been imprisoned in the Gestapo H.Q. in the Avenue Foch at the same time as Noor Inayat Khan, and who had made a brave but abortive attempt to escape with her.

Miss Fuller had followed up this clue, and had met Captain Starr; he had returned from dreadful sufferings in a German extermination camp to find himself treated rather coldly at H.Q. In the course of her inquiries, Miss Fuller discovered that this was because he was believed, during his period as a prisoner in Paris, to have behaved in a manner not entirely creditable. Miss Fuller held the view that Captain Starr had been grossly maligned in this matter, and *The Starr Affair* was a powerful essay in his defence.

Amongst the many controversial matters raised in this book, it was stated that a number of British radio transmitters, in the hands of S.O.E. agents, had been captured by the Germans, and worked back by them to London; that is to say, messages had been sent under German direction and control and they had been accepted in London as genuine. This, inevitably, led to many disasters.

The 'radio game'—the working back, by the Germans, of captured radios—was of vital consequence; I had, until I read *The Starr Affair*, no suspicion that such things had happened in France. Jean Overton Fuller had not revealed, in *Madeleine*, that Noor Inayat Khan's set and codes were captured and successfully worked back for months to London, with frightful results.

When I read *The Starr Affair*, I was appalled to discover that Diana had, in all probability, been arrested as the result of this 'game'. Jean Overton Fuller described how, when under arrest in the Avenue Foch, Starr had suddenly been confronted with his W/T operator, 'Gabriel', who had himself recently been captured, together with 'Pauline'—Diana Rowden; later, Starr and Gabriel were put in the same cell.

This unusual procedure seemed very suspicious, and it at once struck both men that it had been done with a purpose: probably in the hope

that they would talk together indiscreetly. The room might be wired for a hidden microphone. Consequently, they hardly dared say a word; but Gabriel did think he could safely tell Starr how he had been arrested as that, obviously, was information the Germans already possessed.

Another man, he said, had been sent out from London to work with him, but the radio through which the arrangements were made was one of those operated by the Sicherheitsdienst, and his intended colleague was met by a German reception committee as he landed in the field. Within twenty-four hours, he had led the Gestapo to Gabriel.

As Diana Rowden had been brought to the Avenue Foch with Gabriel, it was reasonably certain, I felt, that she, too, had been arrested in the same way. That is to say, as a result of a successful German deception practised on London H.Q. It was not, I thought, a pretty piece of news.

Colonel Henri's Story was also startling. I did not of course accept as truth all that Bleicher said of himself; on the other hand, I could not dismiss it all as false. Bleicher's most powerful weapon was his pose as a German officer secretly opposed to the Nazi régime, and working for its defeat; it was by this deception that he gained the confidence of many genuine members of the Resistance, including Henri Frager. His role as 'Colonel Henri', the anti-Hitler German officer and gentleman, was well played; Bleicher is himself strongly of this opinion, as his book makes plain.

In *Odette* Mr. Tickell painted him in rather less flattering colours; when I met him myself, in Tett nang, in April 1956, I found him a chubby, amiable, cosy little man, busy selling tobacco. . . .

That meeting, however, came much later.

Yet when in the summer of 1955 I had read *The Starr Affair* and *Colonel Henri's Story*, treachery began, dimly, to assume its proper proportions. I realized that in the strange twilight of espionage shapes seldom revealed themselves as black or white. More often they slid in grey anonymity across the narrow vista of the eye, secret and insubstantial, without form.

I realized, with a horrid pang, that in Occupied France it had not been a case of all those who are not for me, are against me. . . . Some tried to have a toe in both camps. I realized that some frail patriots had been driven by desperate pressure into the role of traitor; that some had, with an ugly ardour, savoured from the start the taste of

treachery. I realized that men had sold their country as gladly as they would hand over a shilling for a packet of cigarettes. I realized, too, that it was foolish to indulge the dream that our enemies had been uniformly stupid. Some of their Intelligence work had been very sharp indeed.

On reflection, these shocks assimilated, I was grateful to Starr and to Bleicher for the cold douches they had administered. They had removed once and for all the role of the agent from the realms of cops and robbers and had revealed it for what it was: a sad journey through a territory of fear and darkness and a great loneliness.

All this gave me much food for thought; I had, thus, at the very start of my quest, come upon evidence that Diana Rowden had worked for a German penetrated *réseau*—that being the French word for a Resistance group. I had visualized her story following the triumphant pattern set by those who had written before me; now I knew it must be very different.

I had, too, from these books, got scraps of information about two of the women who had been her companions on that journey from Fresnes—Vera Leigh and Andrée Borrell. In the case of Andrée Borrell, indeed, it amounted to much more than scraps, for she had been a member of a *réseau* with which Noor Inayat Khan had worked, and in *Madeleine, Colonel Henri's Story* and *The Starr Affair*, I was to read much of the tragedy of her capture.

Of Vera Leigh there was less to learn; Hugo Bleicher confirmed that she had worked under the code name Simone, and that she had been closely concerned with Henri Frager in the *réseau* Jean Marie. She had been arrested, he said, early in 1944 (in fact, memory was at fault here, she was arrested in November 1943) shortly after a clandestine visit to Paris by Nicholas Boddington, second in command, I understood, to Colonel Buckmaster. She had, Bleicher said, been betrayed.

This too made me think deeply; not only was Diana connected with a *réseau* penetrated by the Germans, so too were two of her friends, whose story I had set myself the task of unravelling. I cannot say that at this stage I suspected what I have since come to believe to be the truth about the strange treatment they received, the ignoble deaths to which they were subjected, but I was very profoundly shaken.

In this state of mind I sat down to read, yet again, with close

attention, the book *Madeleine*, Colonel Buckmaster's *Specially Employed* and *The Starr Affair*, with the purpose of piecing together, as best I could, the story of Andrée Borrell, known as 'Denise'.

CHAPTER III

DENISE WAS A towering figure in the history of the French Resistance, and it seems remarkable that, when so many were honoured, she should have received no recognition of any sort for her services. She was, incidentally, the first woman agent to be parachuted by S.O.E. into France; she was, in the truest sense, a pioneer and I think it fair to say that her achievements were the foundation on which those of other women were built.

I came, as my knowledge of her grew, to admire her very greatly; and I made, in her connection, the discovery that we are profoundly influenced by outward appearances. For months I had an impression of Andrée Borrell that the future was to prove false; and this was solely on account of the truly dreadful photograph of her that was used to illustrate the report of the Natzweiler Trial. Andrée Borrell was only twenty-four when she died; she cannot have been more than twenty-two when that photograph was taken, in England, before she left on her last journey to France. In it she looks at least thirty-five, and ill-favoured as well; so I pictured her in the imagination, and let it colour my thoughts and speculations. I could scarcely believe my eyes when I was shown, months later, in Paris, another photograph, full face and smiling, of a delightful girl. In that instant, I had to make a reappraisal—not, fortunately, agonizing—of Denise.

On the authority of Colonel Buckmaster, I was able to identify Denise—it is a simpler form to write than Andrée Borrell—as courier and co-organizer to the *réseau* Prosper. Prosper, Colonel Buckmaster also revealed, was a barrister, and a man of high intelligence. He was sent to Paris in the autumn of 1942, to start a Resistance group there, and, equipped with identity papers that described him as a traveller in agricultural products, he spent much of his time visiting farms in the Ile de France. His purpose was to find suitable landing grounds where arms and ammunition, intended for the Paris region, could be dropped.

Denise, whose papers described her as Prosper's sister, travelled everywhere with him, and did most of the talking for Prosper's French accent was not impeccable. This, I would say, came as a surprise to me; perfect French, I had thought, would in those early days at least, have been an indispensable attribute in the agent sent to France. But it was not so with Prosper; nor indeed with other agents sent into the field by S.O.E.

In spite of this handicap, Prosper worked well, and Colonel Buckmaster wrote warmly of his services. 'In four months', he said, 'Prosper had established excellent relations with the big Parisian Resistance groups, and was progressing well in the task of co-ordinating their activities. Between Beauvais and Tours, and between Chartres and Melun, he had formed dozens of small groups, totalling perhaps 10,000 men and women, for the most part, of course, unarmed as yet, who welcomed his assistance with gratitude, and relied on his radio link with London.'

Prosper was the leader; but it is right to record that Denise was, to him, more than a courier. She undertook all the delicate negotiations these developments involved, and to her, too, some of the credit for this excellent work must be ascribed. What is more, though Colonel Buckmaster did not mention this, she accompanied Prosper on acts of open sabotage, exploits that were both dangerous and fruitful.

In June 1943, Prosper returned, briefly, to England. Within a few days he was back in France. Shortly afterwards, he was arrested; it was not, Colonel Buckmaster writes, for several months that he learnt just what had happened. 'Prosper', he says, 'returning from a parachute operation had been arrested at the Gare St. Lazare. He had been searched and held on a vague suspicion. Finally, he was confronted by another officer of the same service, previously arrested. A very intelligent corporal¹ of the German security police penetrated the secret.'

Colonel Buckmaster concluded his account of the *réseau* Prosper by saying that in spite of the blow of his arrest, there were at that time still 150 officers operating in France, in 35 different *réseaux*. Most of them, I think, must have been in the old Unoccupied Zone, as I have been told, on what I consider good authority, that after the arrests of June 1943 there were in fact only 4 S.O.E. circuits left in what had been the Occupied Zone, of which two at least were almost certainly compromised: that is to say, known to the Germans.

Incidentally, Denise was not, as Colonel Buckmaster says, shot in

¹ Bleicher, I presume.

1945 shortly before the war ended; she died at Natzweiler in July 1944.

His account of the Prosper affair is, if one may say so, in any case fragmentary. Prosper was certainly not held on a vague suspicion only; on the contrary, his activities had, for some time, been well known to the Germans. He was actually arrested in a hotel in the rue de Mazargran between 10 and 11 p.m. on the evening of 24 June; he had returned from a visit to Trichâteau where, Madame Guépin, one of his staunchest colleagues, was later to tell me, he had confided to her his sense of great unease, saying he feared that both he and his *réseau* had been betrayed. On his return to Paris, Madame Guépin said, he went straight up to his room in the hotel, without stopping at the reception desk; he was at once arrested by police officers who had been there since 1.30 a.m. the previous morning.

Denise had been arrested the day before Prosper, together with their radio operator 'Archambault', and, it is estimated, some 1,500 French patriots who were working with them. This was, perhaps, the greatest single disaster in the history of the French Resistance. Moreover news of it was, without doubt, immediately conveyed to London by Noor Inayat Khan, who had shortly before these events been sent to France to assist Archambault as a radio operator, and who avoided arrest at this time.

My first inklings of the magnitude, and the terrible consequences, of this tragedy were conveyed to me by *The Starr Affair* and the biography of Noor Inayat Khan, *Madeleine*, to which I have previously referred. Quoting Ernest, an interpreter to the Gestapo, whom the author had interviewed, she wrote, 'Nearly all the letters sent by Prosper and Archambault to the head office of the French Section in London were intercepted by our Service and a photostat made, after which they were forwarded. Through these letters . . . we learned the addresses of Prosper, Archambault, Denise and their principal (French) collaborators and their letter boxes. This allowed us to arrest nearly all the members of their organization at one stroke.'

When I first read this, I knew very much less about the Prosper affair than I do now; but, taken in conjunction with Hugo Bleicher's recollection of this period, it was clear to me that very much more lay behind the arrest of Denise than had been revealed in *Specially Employed*; it now seems to me that the account given there was excessively reticent.

A much fuller account of this affair was given by Jean Overton

Fuller in *Madeleine*, for the disasters of June 1943 closely affected the heroine of this book—Noor Inayat Khan. It was said that they had left her, as the only W/T operator still at liberty, in the position of being the solitary link left with London, and gave her opportunity to lay bare her almost superhuman courage. She turned down the suggestion that she should, by virtue of her extreme peril, return herself to England and remained instead at her post that had, overnight, become the most important in France.

Fifteen months later she was to die with Yolande Beekman, Eliane Plewman and Madeleine Damerment in Dachau; Andrée Borrell had found death two months earlier.

There can be no doubt whatsoever, that Noor Inayat Khan remained in touch with London after the calamitous arrests of that June, and it is difficult therefore to understand how months should have passed, as Colonel Buckmaster says was the case, before London learnt what had happened to Prosper.

Moreover, it cannot, I think, be true, as was specifically stated in the Citation to her George Cross, that Noor Inayat Khan was, at that period, 'the only remaining link with London'. Another French Section W/T operator, 'Lt. Gaston Cohen, M.C., was also at liberty, and sent intelligence of the mass arrests to London.' (Ref: Jean Overton Fuller, direct from Lt. Cohen.)¹

All this I found confusing; the reminiscences of Hugo Bleicher added to my distress. I was painfully innocent in those days. What I had seen as a clear, uncomplicated story of valour and action suddenly became immensely devious, a cesspit of treachery, confusion and double-dealing. I realized, then, that my quest would be infinitely more difficult than I had first conceived it would be; I realized that it would be

¹ In his second book, *They Fought Alone*, Colonel Buckmaster says he did know about the arrest of Prosper, and his colleagues, almost at once. He also says (p. 209) that S.O.E. had a 'shadow organization in Paris, totally separate and beyond the knowledge of Prosper, which was intended to take over if anything should happen to Francis [Suttill=Prosper. I had been asked not to reveal his true name, but as Colonel Buckmaster has now done so, there is no reason why I should conceal it.—E. N.]. We now started another shadow organization beyond that, so that we had three whole set-ups acting without knowledge of each other.'

This would seem to be confirmation that Noor Inayat Khan was not, then, the only remaining link between London and Paris.

I would much like to know the views of professionals in the realms of undercover work on the desirability of having three networks, overlapping one another in the same area, each ignorant of the existence of the other two.

a story immensely diffuse, a river with countless muddled tributaries along which I might stumble in the dark. I think I realized, too, at this time, that it would be impossible properly to follow my river to its source; too many vested interests would have erected strong dams to bar my passage. And in this, I was very right.

What I had learnt, at this stage, about Denise was not very reassuring. Her arrest and death were certainly due to circumstances of a nature that none of the earlier published books about S.O.E. had even hinted at. This, too, was true of Vera Leigh. From Bleicher's reminiscences I had learnt a little about her arrest, and that little was not agreeable. It was clear that she, also, had been a member of a *réseau* deeply compromised by treachery and that she had been under German surveillance long before the day when she was finally taken into custody.

I turned to Yolande Beekman, the last of the women whose story I sought whom I could identify in *Specially Employed*; for I assumed—correctly—that the Yolande in the chapter *Swiss-Canadian Alliance*, was in fact Yolande Beekman.

I learned that she had been wireless operator to one Guy, a Canadian; his real name, I discovered four months later, was Guy Bieler. Today, the main street of the little village of Fonsomme, not far from St. Quentin, is named after him. He was a man of formidable stature.

Yolande, *Specially Employed* told me, was a girl of Swiss extraction, who had been a member of the W.A.A.F. Her French was perfect (in Fonsomme, M. Cordelette, a local leader of the Resistance, who had known her well, told me her only fault was an inability to pronounce *Huit* as he thought a Frenchwoman should) and she was quiet, homely, and possessed of great cheerfulness and good humour.

With Guy she went to France one November night. Colonel Buckmaster did not mention the year, but I assumed it must have been 1943, as she was a prisoner in Fresnes in May 1944. Both made a descent by parachute; on landing, Guy injured his back and was in severe pain for a long period. But he refused to return to England.

Subsequently it was this Guy Bieler who organized the sabotage of the St. Quentin lock gates, effectively blocking one route by which the Germans sent submarine parts down to the Mediterranean. It seemed possible, therefore, that Yolande Beekman, like Andrée Borrell, had played a part in some successful acts of sabotage against the enemy.

That, then, was the sum of my knowledge. I had discovered something about Diana Rowden, Yolande Beekman, Vera Leigh and Andrée Borrell; but I knew nothing of Eliane Plewman or Madeleine Damerment. I had not got in touch with the relations of any of these women. I was only just beginning to appreciate the difficulties I would encounter in achieving such links; but it seemed clear that I must get in touch somehow with Jean Overton Fuller.

Her publishers were Gollancz, and, knowing that publishers, very rightly, refuse to give the addresses of their authors, I rang up Gollancz and asked if I might be told if Miss Fuller were in England, so that I might know how quickly a letter addressed care of her publishers would reach her.

I was told that she had, it was thought, just returned from a visit abroad and that a letter would, of course, be sent on to her without delay. I wrote it, and went off again to the library of the Imperial War Museum to make notes from various relevant books.

First, I read some cuttings that an admirable librarian had dug up for me; the copy of *Madeleine*, still in its dust cover, lay beside me. A tall, heavily built, dark man stopped by my chair and asked: 'Are you interested in Noor Inayat Khan?' I said I was. 'I knew her,' he replied, 'in the W.A.A.F.; I worked with her at Abingdon. Did you know that the B.B.C. put on a play about her on TV?' I said I had not known this, and, in turn, asked him if he had met Miss Fuller, and he replied that he had; he had met her while she was writing *Madeleine*. She lived in Bloomsbury—within a short distance of the *Sunday Times* offices where I worked—and he gave me her telephone number.

This second coincidence moved me to telephone Miss Fuller that day; normally, I am much against the practice of ringing up strangers, and asking questions. A letter seems to me to be a better method of introduction. But I broke my self-imposed rule, and telephoned; Miss Fuller was just going out, but she listened to my explanation patiently and accepted an invitation to come and dine with me.

Before ringing off I asked her if, by any chance, she knew where Mrs. Rowden lived, if she were still alive. She told me that Mrs. Rowden was certainly alive, and that Dame Irene Ward might know her address. Dame Irene had recently finished a history of the F.A.N.Y., that included a chapter on the S.O.E. women, and had probably been in touch with Mrs. Rowden.

Dame Irene was, as it happened, an old pen-friend of mine, and I

had just written to her; here, it seemed to me, might be another valuable source of information.

When I got home, I found a letter from her, inviting me to dine at the House.

CHAPTER IV

I NOW HAD FIVE meetings to which to look forward; they were spread out over June and July. I first met Vera Atkins, who dined with me on 10 June; Jean Overton Fuller dined with me on 18 June; on 25 June I dined, in turn, with Miss Atkins; on 28 June I had luncheon with Colonel Buckmaster, on 30 June I had dinner with Dame Irene Ward, and on 7 July I had luncheon with Miss MacLellan, Commandant of the F.A.N.Y.

I was indeed, very full of engagements, but I was at this time burning with impatience; I felt myself on the threshold of great mysteries, and was eager to penetrate them. I was much confused in mind; I did not know whether Baker Street had been a sanctuary of saints or a den of devils. Had Colonel Buckmaster, when I met him, been possessed of a couple of horns I do not think I would have been surprised; nor would a halo have unduly disconcerted me. He had neither, but he had a very nice taste in wine.

It is fair to say that riper consideration has persuaded me that no one, now, will ever piece together the full story of French Section, S.O.E. But I do know that mistakes were made, and some of those who were at the heart of affairs are the first to admit them. Vera Atkins said to me once, 'of course we made mistakes; and in war mistakes cost lives. Do not think that knowledge of that will not be with us till we die.'

Ten years after the end of the war, it is impossible to find the whole truth about what happened in Occupied France. Last night,¹ as I write this, I spoke to Vera Atkins on the telephone, and told her that a Frenchwoman, whom I had recently met in Paris, had told me her name had been betrayed to the Germans by a woman agent of S.O.E. after prolonged torture. I told Vera that Madame X had told me this without rancour and without recrimination; she accepted the simple fact that we all had a limit to our physical endurance. At once Vera said: 'How can Madame X be sure that Z gave her name away? It may

¹ Autumn, 1955.

have been Z's arrest that led to the arrest of Madame X, but how do we know that a scrap of paper was not found on Z, that gave details? How can we be sure she spoke?

Of course, we cannot be. It is, I think, sure that in some matters the enemy outsmarted Baker Street; it is sure that there were traitors in France; it is sure that many terrible things happened, and that many people went to a terrible death.

What matters, now, was the pudding they helped to make. And proof of that pudding lies in many things. In the help given by the French Forces of the Interior (of which S.O.E. *réseaux* formed a part) when they rose against the invader in June 1944; in the links that were tempered in a bitter fire between many French people and the British liaison officers who went to France, in great peril, to help prepare them for that hour; in the fact of French Resistance, hard, strong, indestructible, that today gives France her just place in the world.

In 1958, Resistance is in some quarters discredited; for this, those who joined it when all was over bar the shouting have much to answer for. There are those who say, at the end of it all, what did it do? Some bridges destroyed, some factories disabled, some locks blown up. These few things at vast cost in life and material. What value had it?

All the value in life; proof of faith and hope and charity. Proof that a France, seemingly wrapped in thick swaddling clothes of weakness and corruption, still guarded in her heart stone as indestructible as diamond, and as sharp; a hard core of citizens who made no compromise and accepted no humiliation, who lived to restore France and died, many of them, before the chains were even loosened from her wrists.

This we should remember. We cannot judge the achievements of the French Section by purely military standards, nor should we judge them against the background of the massive forces that were deployed by the Allies in 1944. We should judge them against the thick dangers of 1940, and 1941, of the days when our backs were to the wall and victory a distant concept of faith only. The first S.O.E. liaison officer was dropped into France on 12 May 1941; exactly one year after the German invasion of Belgium and Holland.

In May 1941, Allied victory might have seemed a forlorn hope to a France Occupied by the enemy. That British liaison officers never lacked French comrades is the vindication of their work. I love France dearly; but had there been no Resistance, and no Frenchmen and Frenchwomen who were incapable of accepting defeat, I cannot think that my feelings for France would have remained unchanged.

As I brooded on these things, my concepts of the women whose story I was pursuing changed a little. I became a little less concerned about what they did, and more concerned about what they were. They must, I reflected, have had their roots in richly nourishing earth, that they had strength to live and die in such perfect courage. It became very important to me to trace their relations, and find out what I could of their lives before the war.

I was as far from making these contacts as ever, except in the case of Diana Rowden. Dame Irene had told me that while she did not know Mrs. Rowden's address, a cousin who lived in her constituency would be able to supply it. That was a beginning. I had hopes that Colonel Buckmaster or Vera Atkins might supply other links; but I felt a little frustrated.

So I turned, for the moment, to more practical matters; I picked up what I could about the training agents received in Britain before they were qualified for the field. Much has been written about this, and it would be wearisome to repeat it; what interested me was the peculiarly felicitous choice of site for the different training schools.

The agent began at Wanborough Manor, lying close to the old Pilgrim's Way across the Hog's Back, a path beaten out by the feet of faith.

He did hard physical training on the west coast of Scotland, at Arisaig and Meoble, in a country I know well and which is, I think, amongst the most beautiful in the world. It was through this country that Prince Charles moved as a fugitive and was at great risk given shelter by those who believed in his cause.

The agent went to Beaulieu where, in 1215, Cistercian monks from France founded an abbey; where, on Buckler's Hard, ships were built for the British Navy. Here some of Nelson's men-of-war first took the water, including the great Agamemnon. He went, if he were to be dropped by parachute, in the end to Tempsford, an R.A.F. station not far from Bedford, in the heart of the Bunyan country, within short distance of the church where Bunyan preached truth as he believed it and in consequence lay in prison for twelve years.

It seemed to me that all these points were most strangely appropriate; and I resolved to find what remained today of their secret wartime activity. So I wrote to Edward Montagu at the Palace of Beaulieu, to Wanborough Manor, to Edinburgh to inquire about Meoble, to the Air Ministry to ask if Tempsford were still an R.A.F. airfield.

This helped time to pass; and the day came when Vera Atkins was to dine with me. I spent an agreeable evening, much interested in her conversation and her striking personality. When she had gone, I realized I had learnt nothing. I recalled a passage in *Colonel Henri's Story* describing the months he spent as a prisoner in England after the war, undergoing interrogation by the British Intelligence Service.

He had said: 'I was startled one morning to be visited by a very pretty young woman officer in uniform. She turned out to have more aplomb than all the other officers put together. She boxed me in with astonishing ease and consummate tactics. Luckily my memory is good or she might well have put me in an awkward position. She seemed also to be quite tireless in her questioning and if the conducting officer had not felt hungry at lunch time and urged her to break off the interrogation, she would have kept me on tenterhooks for a good deal longer.'

The pretty young woman was Vera Atkins.

Incidentally, Vera told me, at a later date, that she had not read this book; she did not approve of it for she did not see why Hugo Bleicher should be building up a sterling balance in royalties. I then told her she was mentioned in it as having interrogated Bleicher, and she replied immediately that it had been maddening; just as she had felt she was getting somewhere, the conducting officer, who was entirely indifferent, had said 'lunch time, what say we go eat?' [Bleicher, too, had good cause to remember this officer's preoccupation with his stomach.]

When Vera left that night, I felt rather as Bleicher did. That I had been boxed in with astonishing ease. We had talked, we had discussed, we had exchanged ideas; but I had learnt nothing.

A day or two later I sat down and, with deliberation, wrote Vera a letter, asking her indulgence, and attaching a list of specific points on which she might inform me. She retaliated by asking me to dinner.

My next meeting, a week later, was with Jean Overton Fuller. We talked late, and she gave me a considerable amount of background information, for which I was grateful. She also told me something about her friend, Noor Inayat Khan, and this confirmed my belief that all the women who went to France as agents had unusual gifts. I think I sensed, then, that they must, each one, have been possessed of extraordinary tranquillity of spirit; in each one was a core of strength that nothing could dissipate.

A few days later, I went to dinner with Vera; again I felt myself

outmanœuvred. I may, of course, be wrong in believing this; perhaps no manœuvring went on at all. I realize, at least, that I was in those days extremely naïve, believing that she could, more than ten years later, remember all the excessively intricate details of her wartime service, believing that she would have every name, history, date, address and connection still in her head. This was stupid; nevertheless, I left with the conviction that she did not want to discuss these matters with me. I did have the grace to say to myself, Why should she? as I sped home in a taxi.

I was innocent in other matters then; I had no idea that in France the Resistance was already history, and that much had already been placed at the disposal of the biographer. I could have saved myself a vast amount of trouble had I gone to Paris sooner; but I could not foresee in June 1955 that in Paris I would find an organization devoted entirely to the history of the Resistance, and would get complete lists of all the S.O.E. *réseaux* without any difficulty.

For months I laboriously pieced together what I could; in Paris in one afternoon I copied on my typewriter in a hotel bedroom documents that I had not realized still existed, the contents of which I had worked months to collect in spare outline.

I remembered this dinner with Vera in a *wagon-lit* of the Night Ferry, as I read a book by the Abbé Guillaume *La Sologne au Temps de l'Héroïsme et de la Trahison*. John Starr had lent me this book, and chapters of it were devoted to the Prosper affair; included were a photograph of Prosper, and his real name. I remembered, wryly, that Vera had declined to give me this name and, indeed, I respected her for it. But I had no idea that in France the whole history had, with great detail, been put in print.

So I went to luncheon on a very hot day at the end of June with Colonel Buckmaster. I had just concluded an exchange of slightly acrimonious letters with him, and I felt a trifle wary; it would be awkward if we ate together, side by side, on terms of armed neutrality.

Our acerbity had a simple foundation. I had, by then, reached the conclusion—quite falsely as it turned out—that I would get nowhere if I failed to gain access to official archives that would give me some solid fact to work on. I had therefore, by devious means, known in the vernacular as 'the old boy network', tried to find out where the S.O.E. archives lay interred. The network had led me to someone in the Cabinet Office, but as he was on holiday and away from London for some weeks, this was, for the time being, a dead end.

I had asked Vera about archives, but she had told me that French Section records had always been diffuse, that she had herself gutted them when the Section was being disbanded, that professional archivists had further gutted them before committing them to some dark cellar, and that they would be of no value to me.

Nevertheless, I persisted, and wrote to Colonel Buckmaster asking if he knew where they were. He had replied that there were no records, that everyone had been working far too hard to keep up with paper, and that French Section, S.O.E., was not a regular unit, with nominal rolls entitling personnel to rations.

This had stung me to reply that I had not, in fact, thought that this would be the case; nevertheless, on his showing no less than 500 British liaison officers had been recruited by French Section, and I felt that their records, operations and activities could not have been kept entirely in the memory. If for no other reason, there must have been personal files that dealt with such matters as pay, allowances and next of kin.

There had been no answer to this and, as I went into the Villa Villa, holding, appropriately, a copy of a Henty novel that I had just purchased from a junk shop for 6d., I was slightly uneasy.

I need not have been; Colonel Buckmaster had decided that he had, perhaps, been a trifle hard on me and, by way of amend, he lent me some reports, covering the tour of France that had been made by a representative team of French Section immediately after the liberation.

With a strong effort of will I restrained an almost overwhelming impulse to sit down to read those papers there and then, and proceeded instead to luncheon.

The only impression that the meal left with me was of an implied ruthlessness: those who controlled underground work could not be swayed by any personal considerations; results were everything and the individual nothing. I felt that Colonel Buckmaster was trying to present himself to me as a very hard man, but I was not convinced that this was indeed so.

I was, at this time, particularly concerned with the question of radio transmitters that had been captured, with their codes, by the Germans, and were worked back by them to London, conveying false information. In *The Starr Affair*, Miss Fuller had, on the evidence of John Starr, alleged that the Germans were doing this on a large scale; and it had been denied by Colonel Buckmaster in a letter to the *Empire News* on 24 August 1954. He had said that only one network was controlled by the enemy.

Starr had further alleged that Baker Street had, it seemed, accepted as genuine messages sent out without the proper security checks, a circumstance which should have warned our people that the messages were not genuine.

A security check, I should explain, was an individual matter for each agent, each one of whom had his own device; omission of this in any coded message should have warned London that all was not well. But, Starr had alleged, when Archambault gave his code to the Germans, he had not given the security checks, and thus was not very worried; he was astonished when a German radio specialist in the Avenue Foch told him a reply had come from London to a message sent in his code saying, 'You have forgotten your double security check. Be more careful.'

Before meeting Colonel Buckmaster, I had talked with two friends who knew a certain amount about these matters, and who had been something of specialists in the field of radio communications. Both had assured me that an experienced operator could recognize the touch on the keys of the man who was transmitting; this, they said, was as distinctive as handwriting, and it was virtually impossible for one operator to simulate the touch of another. London should, therefore, when the German-operated transmitters came on the air, have been informed that the touch was not that of the genuine operator.

They told me, too, that there were other, highly ingenious devices, used for detecting the false operator from the real; these are still considered secret by our authorities, though the Germans undoubtedly knew about them. They added that it was of course true that only an experienced man would be able to recognize an operator by his touch.

All this had, inevitably, struck me as most strange, and I was long-ing to ask Colonel Buckmaster questions; but it is difficult to sit beside a man and eat his meat and drink his wine and say, cheerfully, 'Do tell me, did you make some frightful boobs during the war?'

I glided round the subject as gently as I could, but even so I suspect that Colonel Buckmaster was well aware of my manoeuvres and was, for all I know, entertained by them. We came to bedrock, however, only once, when I asked, boldly, 'How many captured wireless sets were worked back by the Germans?' and he replied, 'One.' For the record, I went straight home and committed this at once to paper.

We also disputed, but mildly, the importance of intuition in Intel-ligence work; it had to be mild, for I had no personal experience at

all of this activity, and Colonel Buckmaster had plenty. But I was persuaded—perhaps by reason of my sex—that intuition must play a part. This Colonel Buckmaster denied.

I remembered, though did not mention it, that Freya Stark had seemed to confirm, at least in part, my theory. In one of her books of autobiography Miss Stark said she had, in the 1914 war, been employed in Postal Censorship. Those letters that struck the examiners as being suspicious were removed from the mail, and sent to higher authority for further consideration, the examiner adding a note giving the reasons why each letter had seemed suspicious. Miss Stark said that she very often had great difficulty in writing this note, for usually she was quite unable to say *why* the letter in question had awakened her interest; she only knew it *had*. Yet a very high percentage of the letters she thus intercepted did, in fact, prove worthy of investigation.

It seemed to me evident that in some forms of counter-espionage and Intelligence work, intuition must play a part; that some people had a nose that could smell what was false, what was dangerous, what was misleading even when all appeared entirely normal. This may be a natural instinct given to some, or it may be a highly developed sense of perception; but, in brief, to describe it as intuition, no matter how it may have been achieved, seemed to me reasonable.

Colonel Buckmaster would have none of this; he was all for reason, logic and facts. We stalked warily round a few more controversial subjects, and so our luncheon ended. I went out into the fierce mid-day heat, clutching my large manilla envelope, and took a taxi home.

I spent the rest of the afternoon reading its contents.

As I read, my thoughts, drugged by the perhaps imprudent consumption of wine at luncheon on a hot day, wandered a little from time to time. I harked back to one very valuable remark that Colonel Buckmaster had made. I had, I think, said that the courage of these women appalled me; that never would I have done what they did. The thought of dropping into Occupied France made my blood run cold.

Colonel Buckmaster, very rightly, did not attempt to persuade me that I might somewhere have found the necessary fortitude. But he did make the point that for almost all the women in French Section, France was home. Some of them were French, most had lived the greater part of their lives in France, some had indeed been in France in 1940, and had lived under the Occupation for varying periods

before escaping to England. 'To put yourself in their place,' Colonel Buckmaster said, 'you must imagine yourself dropping into Sussex or Yorkshire. For them, France was not a foreign country, it was home. They knew where they were.'

That, I thought, was a well-made point. But, as I read the reports, some doubts came into my mind. I thought of Diana Rowden, who had spoken excellent French but could not have been taken as French by a Frenchman. I remembered the passage in Peter Churchill's book, describing her as 'patently English'; at that moment, as I lay on my bed on a hot June afternoon, the thought first entered my head that it might, from the first, have been foolish to send Englishwomen to France to act as couriers. For them, above all else, it was essential that they should be accepted, unquestioningly, as Frenchwomen.

I did not think that could have been the case with Diana.

CHAPTER V

MY NEXT ENGAGEMENT was with Irene Ward. It was still warm and the sky only sparsely brushed with cloud as I walked past Westminster Abbey, where some American tourists were busily photographing the west elevation, across Old Palace Yard, and so through to the Central Lobby.

I filled in my green card, and sat down to await the arrival of Dame Irene. The scene was grateful to my mood, for I was by then deeply concerned with all the ramifications of the agents' life in wartime France, and I had, for forty-eight hours, been asking myself many questions to which, I knew, I would never find an answer.

The main question that then dominated my mind was whether the ends could, possibly, have justified the means in the case of those I had come to regard as 'my' women; were the possibilities of service to the Allied cause that lay before them great enough to warrant the devastating risks they were called upon to face?

I sat, watching a famous Tory member pirouette slowly on one well-shod heel, waving a negligent hand to the ceiling, while respectful constituents hung upon his words. It was to preserve this, I said to myself, that they died; and I thought that Yolande Beekman and Andrée Borrell were, perhaps, two whose achievements justified their

employment. Yolande Beekman was a radio operator whose native tongue was French, and Andrée Borrell, a Frenchwoman, did, in many ways, the work of a man.

But the others, I asked myself, as the House servants went briskly about their business, did the benefits outweigh the dangers there? Diana, Eliane Plewman, Madelcine Damernient, Vera Leigh—should they ever have gone to France? That was a question I might never wholly answer, but I had to know a great deal more before I could begin to form an opinion. I must, I thought, find some of the men who came back, who had commanded women couriers in the field, and be guided by their views.

Thus meditating, I rose to greet Dame Irene; we went through the long corridors, on to the terrace, and sat down beside the Thames.

The river was beautiful and the stone was grey; the air was soft and the first flicker of a star appeared in the sky. I was greatly soothed, for there seemed in the scene an element of response to the questions that disturbed me. This was London, this was the Palace of Westminster and, on a gentle June evening, it went tranquilly about its business, as it had for centuries past. No quisling rump cooled its buttocks on the stone seats, nor legislated in the Chamber within; no alien flag flew from the tower and no foreign soldier stood guard by the doors.

All was as it had been; and in this there was an answer in part at least to my questions. In war, it is the sum that matters, not the parts that make it. The R.A.F. clerk knocked down by a truck on a dark night was no less of the final total than the pilot who made his fifty flights to Germany before dropping swiftly towards death; the seaman washed overboard in the Channel gave as much as the man who fell beside his gun off the River Plate; the soldier who died slowly in a hospital bed gave no less than his comrade of Arnhem.

They had died, each one of them, that the Commons might sit at Westminster, free and undisturbed, and the value of the individual contribution was of little ultimate consequence. In war, men make mistakes; those who died on the beaches in 1940 still give testimony to that truth, and though mistakes were made, too, in that other war that continued in France long after the last bullet fell across the sands of Dunkirk, they cannot take one shred of triumph from those whose lives were forfeit.

In the last analysis it was here, in Westminster, that one knew them all victorious. It was for this they died; the ends justified the means.

So I thought; and later, as I talked to Dame Irene, this conviction gathered strength.

She told me about her history of the F.A.N.Y., and the chapters in it devoted to the F.A.N.Y. members of French Section, S.O.E. I found her generous; material she had herself unearthed with difficulty she made over freely to me. She gave me Mrs. Rowden's address. Finally, she told me in good round terms I would waste my time if I tried to gain access to any official archives and, sweeping me up, she shot off towards Palace Yard, leapt into a taxi, and was whirled away towards King's Cross and her Northern constituency.

I walked through Trafalgar Square, beneath the lime green shadow of Nelson, and under the Admiralty Arch, and thought of Mrs. Rowden who lived, I now knew, in a Telegraph House in Hampshire, in the next village to one of my oldest friends, who had also been at school with Diana. I resolved to write to her at once and, if she agreed, travel to Hampshire to meet her.

On the next day I wrote my first letter to Telegraph House, and was very delighted to get a swift and friendly reply from Mrs. Rowden. She told me she had been a little hurt that small recognition had been given to the glorious deeds of the band of heroines, of which her daughter was one, who did not survive, and that she would welcome a book which told of Diana and her comrades in distress.

This was a very great relief to me, for I had been heavily conscious that, in writing to Mrs. Rowden, I might cause her pain; I felt that I could reawaken memories that the years might, in part, have laid to rest. Had I done that, I would have been profoundly angry with myself; I was glad to know that Mrs. Rowden did not resent my purpose.

From my files, I see we corresponded constantly throughout July and August—Mrs. Rowden wrote me no less than ten letters in this period. She had invited me to go and see her in Hampshire, but in accepting this I was delayed by an infection in my leg; I did not see her until the last week-end in July. By then, I had gathered a considerable mass of further information. I had also discovered, from Mrs. Rowden herself, that she knew nothing whatsoever of Diana's work in the field, or the circumstances of her arrest. I felt then—and this was an emotion I was to feel again many times as my quest proceeded—that it was shocking that I, in a few weeks and without any official backing or approval, had been able to uncover information that had been withheld from the next of kin of those who died.

In the late summer and early autumn of 1955, I found myself, over and over again, telling a mother, or a sister, or a husband, what had happened twelve years before. . . .

At first, I was exceedingly chary of this responsibility; I shrank from the knowledge that I might cause pain. It was only as time went by that I realized all those whom I met, who had lost close relations in France, had been haunted by uncertainty; that the anguish of unknowing was far greater than truth, however brutal.

Moreover, I was, and for this I am profoundly grateful, able to lay some fears at rest. Mrs. Rowden, for example, had for twelve years believed her daughter had failed in her wartime mission; this was the answer she had found for herself when wondering why she had been told nothing, had heard nothing from those who came back. She was left knowing nothing but that Diana had died, in terrible circumstances, at Natzweiler; and she thought the silence could have only one meaning. That her daughter had failed, and silence was the kindest gift authority could bestow on her.

I was able to reassure her on that; I was able to trace Diana's months in France in 1943, I met many of those who had worked with her and held her memory in affectionate admiration. It angered me very greatly that for twelve years Mrs. Rowden could have had doubts about Diana's mission; and anger sharpened my resolve to complete my work.

A few days later I had luncheon with Miss MacLellan, the Commandant of the F.A.N.Y. Corps and through her I first got my teeth into my task.

The F.A.N.Y. headquarters was in Sloane Street and on my way there one achingly hot July morning I stopped first in Wilton Place to see, in the churchyard of St. Paul's Knightsbridge, the memorial tablet that held the names of Diana Rowden and the twelve comrades who, with her, had lost their lives in France.

Already London had worked on the white stone, and it melted unobtrusively into the tree-shadowed church wall. It held fifty-two names in all—all those of the F.A.N.Y. Corps who had given their lives in the years 1939-45. By then, the names of the thirteen members French Section, S.O.E., were familiar to me, but they had no personal significance. Only Diana Rowden had I known, twenty-five years before, in a school set beneath a long low line of hills. I remembered it then as I stood in the churchyard; the smell of ink and chalk dust, the lazy droning of bees around the flower beds, goal posts pointing

white and bleak towards a winter sky. Then, we had all been on the threshold; and who could have guessed that, for Diana, her stock of years numbered no more than twelve.

I thought suddenly of some lines written by Edna St. Vincent Millay:

*Strange in my hand appears
The pen, and yours broken.
There are ink and tears on the page; only the tears
Have spoken.*

I knew then that nothing I could write or ever hope to write, would be adequate. I understood, a little, what Edna Millay had meant when she said only the tears have spoken.

I thought of the night, that of 16 June 1943, when Diana had landed by Lysander in France; myself safe in bed, warm, befriended, the light glowing, the icy passages of terror, for me, uncharted and unknown territory. I had listened to the planes passing overhead those summer nights; I had not known there were those who were cramped in the dark stricture of metal, leaving the warm familiar world to trace a lonely passage through the monstrous arches of the sky. I had stretched in my bed and listened; thought, good luck to them, rather them than me. I had turned over the page of a book and paid tribute, as I paused, to courage; I had listened until the swift vibration of the great engines had faded slowly from the room, and turned over, switched out the light and gone to sleep.

Not for me the dark night, the flickering instruments, the body cramped by straps and harness; I had never known the fear that was slack and sick and sour and always on the verge of triumph, retreating only at the point of a bayonet sharpened miraculously by unconquerable courage. I had never seen a lamp signalling faintly from a dark field, and known that this was the moment towards which I had, unknowing, all my life converged. I had never stepped out into darkness and danger and death. I had stayed in bed and read, yawned and turned out the light.

I had yawned and stretched and turned out the light on that night of 16 June 1943. My diary told me that I had that day gone to the National Gallery and listened to the music of Mozart; that my sister, then in the A.T.S. and stationed in London, had dined with me; that later I had written for a while and then read some chapters of a new novel. I had slept peacefully in my bed.

And as I slept, Diana had stepped out of a Lysander into a field

somewhere near Angers, where I remembered peaceful rivers and men fishing in the kindly dusk of another June. She had seen England for the last time, and never again would feel the springing English turf beneath her feet, nor hear English voices murmuring softly across an English field. On that night, she had a year and twenty days left to her on earth; and of those months nearly eight were spent in prison.

I stood in the shadows of the trees and remembered this and knew myself inadequate. Perhaps, I thought, as I turned away into the heat and noise of Knightsbridge, there was now only one word left to be said. *Requiescat*. . . .

CHAPTER VI

IT MAY SEEM a little curious that all the women agents of the French Section should have been recruited into the F.A.N.Y., but the reason for this was in fact simple. Many of these women were drawn into the Section direct from civil life, but once in it, it was clearly necessary that they should be in uniform during the period of their training in Britain. As civilians they would have excited much curiosity and comment; a uniform provided the necessary cover for their activities.

The A.T.S., however, could not provide this cover, for a clause in the constitution of the Service forbade its members to take part in active military operations. Here the F.A.N.Y. stepped nobly into the breach and, as Colonel Buckmaster said in *Specially Employed*, throughout the war co-operated with the greatest readiness and efficiency with his organization.

It may perhaps be remembered that in the course of the war, the F.A.N.Y. Corps divided into two sections, which were commonly known as Free F.A.N.Y.'s and F.A.N.Y. A.T.S. The French Section agents were Free F.A.N.Y.'s and as Miss MacLellan had been a F.A.N.Y. A.T.S. during the war she had not known any of them personally. At our luncheon, however, she explained the set-up to me as she knew it; it was her kindness that enabled me to get in touch with many people, and thus trace in outline the work in the field of 'my' agents.

A day or two after that luncheon, I developed a severe infection in my left leg and was in bed for a week or so while copious draughts of penicillin were plugged into my body. This was a very irritating

interruption, but, typewriter balanced precariously on my knees, I was able to get my notes in order and to write to a number of people; to Eliane Plewman's husband, to Vera Leigh's next of kin, to Andrée Borrell's sister, Madame Arend, and to Yolande Beekman's mother. From the first two I got quick and kindly answers; no reply came from the last two, and many weeks passed before I was able to discover the reason. It was simply that both had moved, and my letters had not been forwarded; neither, incidentally, were they returned through the Post Office.

The notes after two months' work were rather fuller than I had initially thought would be possible. This is what they said:

'Squadron Officer Diana Hope Rowden, W.A.A.F. Code name: Paulette. Cover name: Rondeau, Juliette Thérèse. Circuit code name: Chaplain.

'Interesting that the Christian name of her cover name was Juliette, for this was the code name Jerrard Tickell gave her in *Odette*, instead of her true code name of Paulette. He must, it seems, have had access to official files in respect of other women—including Diana—as well as those of *Odette* herself.

'Diana Rowden was landed in France by Lysander in June 1943, as courier to a circuit in the Jura. Her immediate chief (this I assume was John Starr) was arrested a month after her arrival, but in spite of the fact that she was seriously compromised by this and other arrests in the area, she carried on her work in co-operation with the W/T operator of the organization.¹

'For four months she worked untiringly, travelling long distances in dangerous territory in order to maintain liaison between the various groups of the circuit. She was constantly sought after by the Gestapo and was eventually arrested towards the end of November 1943. Gabriel, the W/T operator of her circuit, was arrested at the same time as Diana and both were taken first to Lons le Saunier, then to Paris. Diana was imprisoned in the Gestapo H.Q. in the Avenue Foch from 22 November 1943 until 5 December 1943. She was then imprisoned in Fresnes.

¹ It should be explained that, as time went by, and S.O.E. extended its activities, its agents often worked in teams consisting of an organizing officer, a W/T operator and possibly a woman courier.

Diana Rowden originally worked with John Starr and Gabriel (John Young). After the arrest of Starr, she worked alone, I believe, with Gabriel and came under the general command of 'Stockbroker', who was the principal agent operating in a large area of the Franche-Comté.

'Her character was summed up as: Hardworking, courageous, calm and resourceful. I could wish that Mrs. Rowden had been told this ten years ago; also that her commanding officers in the field (Stockbroker and Gabriel) admired her work greatly.

'The manner in which Mrs. Rowden was informed of her daughter's arrest and ultimate death seems a little strange. The first letter bearing ill news was sent on 15 October 1944, and it told Mrs. Rowden that London had recently been out of touch with Diana, and that under the circumstances she must be considered as missing.

'That was nearly a year after Diana's arrest and, as was subsequently discovered, more than three months after her death.

'Another letter was sent on 22 December 1945, which said in part: "Diana was very keen on this work, and the only aspect of it which troubled her considerably was the thought of the anxiety which you would suffer if you lacked all news . . . we now know that she was unhappily arrested towards the end of November 1943. For various reasons we did not hear of this until the spring of 1944."

'A last letter was sent in April 1946, which gave details of Diana's imprisonment in Karlsruhe and her death in Natzweiler Concentration Camp. Referring to Diana and her companions the letter said: "The girls were or appeared to be in good health and bore themselves with courage and were utterly defiant in their attitude to the S.S. . . . all who came into contact with Diana during the time of her imprisonment have spoken most highly of her courage and morale."

'That much about Diana; it seems a little odd that London did not know of her arrest until the spring of 1944 for Stockbroker was never taken and survives today. There may be a good reason why during this period he was unable to get any news to London. But surely he would have known of her arrest?

'It seems odd, too, that a letter should have been sent to Mrs. Rowden nearly a year after Diana's arrest saying that London had only recently lost touch with her.'

Those were my notes; it is fair to add that I have since been given a partial explanation as to why, in some cases, 'good news' letters were sent to relations long after the woman concerned had been arrested. It was simply that those leaving for the field were asked what they wished done. Did they want their next of kin to be informed as soon as London lost contact with them or should this be delayed until firm news of arrest or death had been received? Many agents preferred that nothing

be told their relations until some definite information about them had reached London. They felt that this would save their next of kin long months of torturing uncertainty.¹

Nevertheless, I have no idea why Mrs. Rowden should suddenly have been told in October 1944 that Diana was missing. On its own admission London had known in the spring that she had been arrested but another eighteen months were to pass before the circumstances of her death were established.

In fact, London had it seems known of Diana's arrest very shortly after it happened, which makes it even more baffling. In October 1955 I met Stockbroker in whose region Diana had worked; he had himself been wounded soon after her arrest and had made a hazardous escape to Switzerland. Once there he found means, of course, of getting information to London; he assured me that this included news of Diana's and Gabriel's arrest. Why, in that letter of December 1945, did the War Office tell Mrs. Rowden it had not learnt of her daughter's arrest until the spring of 1944? It simply was not true, and as the war in Europe had then been over seven months one cannot see what security purpose might have been served by this deliberate lie.

It would be foolish to make too much of these strange events, for it is difficult to see what significance they have. Nevertheless, I feel very strongly that the War Office owed it to the relations of those who died to tell them the truth when it could no longer have any security value; and surely there was none once the war with Germany was over?

¹ It will be appreciated that communications between an agent in the field and his, or her, relations in England were, of necessity, extremely limited. Occasionally, I understand, it was possible for brief letters to be exchanged; these would be brought in and out of France, together with official reports and other documents, by Lysander.

In order that relations at home should not be left without news for long periods, it was routine that the London H.Q. should send at regular intervals—normally, I believe, each month—a brief letter to next of kin; those I have seen read, simply: 'We continue to receive excellent news of X,' or some such formula. They were, therefore, known as Good News Letters.

In some cases, these were sent long after the agent in question had been arrested, sometimes after she was, in fact, dead. In none of the cases I have investigated was authority prepared to admit that this was in fact so, though if the letters were sent from kindly motives it is difficult to see why the truth should not ultimately have been revealed. As it was not, however, it meant that lies had to be told about the true date of arrest, so that the story told should square with the date of the despatch of the last 'good news' letter. This was particularly flagrant in the case of Madame Unternährer, the mother of Yolande Beckman.

'Vera Leigh. Code name: Simone. Cover name: Suzanne Chavanne. Circuit: Inventor.

'Area of operations: Paris, Troyes, Nancy, Besançon. Her duty to act as courier for Inventor, under whose command she was, and Donkeyman (Henri Frager).

'She worked in the field from her arrival on 14 June 1943 until she disappeared with one "Jacky", a bodyguard of Inventor, on 30 November of that year. She had a rendezvous with him, and they must have been arrested together. Described as "A very gallant girl; she was secretly terrified by the thought of the mission, but still more terrified by the fear of showing her terror to anyone. Very game, very plucky, rather imaginative. Her decision to go ahead was a brave one."

'Another source says that at the time of her arrest she was living at 11 bis rue Marbeau, Paris; she was interned at Fresnes under her cover name, and was in the 3^e Section Femmes, Cell 410. This source thought her real identity not known to the Germans, which may be true, but it is certain that they knew she was a member of French Section, S.O.E., and was grilled by the Gestapo.

'In papers relating to Vera Leigh, there is this information about her last weeks of life. It is relevant also to Diana, and Andrée Borrell:

' "In Karlsruhe, they were placed in separate cells, which they shared with German women who were there as political prisoners or as common criminals. They received the same rations and treatment and were given occasional exercise in the prison yard. They were not ill treated, and were probably better off than those in concentration camps. They managed to communicate with each other, though this was not permitted.

' "They were fetched from Karlsruhe between 4 and 5 a.m. on 6 July 1944 by members of the Gestapo either of Karlsruhe or more likely, of Strasbourg. They were probably first taken to the Gestapo office for final interrogation: this would account for the time taken to cover the 100 odd miles between Karlsruhe and Natzweiler on the road that goes through Strasbourg.

' "They arrived at the gates of the camp between 1 and 3 p.m. on 6 July; on arrival, they were put together in one cell, and after appearing to have been divided into two cells and before evening into separate cells. Vera Leigh got into communication with a prisoner working in the Zellenbau, and asked him for a pillow: Lt.-Commander O'Leary (also a prisoner) was able to exchange a few words with another of the girls.¹

¹ Andrée Borrell. See footnote, p. 205.

Andrée Borrell got into communication with Dr. Boogaerts with whom she exchanged a few words through a window. He threw her some cigarettes and she threw him her money bag, containing a tobacco pouch, which he still has in his possession."

That was all I knew about Vera Leigh, though the story of her last day of life was expanded in the report of the Natzweiler Trial. She did not know and neither did Diana Rowden or Andrée Borrell that they were being taken to Natzweiler for execution; they believed they were going to a camp to do agricultural work.

Of Andrée Borrell and Yolande Beekman, in addition to the information I had gained from books already set out in Chapter III, I was able to make these notes:

'Borrell, Andrée. Born 18 November 1919. Occupation: Nurse. Mother and Father French. Worked in Marseilles and Périgord. Code name: Whitebeam. Field names: Monique, Denise.

'Documentary name: Denise Urbain. Circuit code name: Physician. Left for the field by parachute 24 September 1942. Assisted in many acts of sabotage.

'Sister: Madame Arend, 23 rue Caumartin.

'Acted as courier and lieutenant to Physician (Prosper), took part in reception committee that welcomed him, December 1942. Reported by Physician to be a perfect lieutenant; he was useless without her assistance owing to his imperfect French accent. She shared all dangers. Worked in the Paris and Normandy sections of his circuit.

'She accompanied Physician on all his missions, and carried out all the most delicate liaison work. Organized several receptions of arms, and also took part in several *coups de main*, notably at Chantilly in March 1943.

'Owing to her cool judgment, she was always chosen for the most delicate and dangerous work, such as recruiting and arranging rendez-vous. She distinguished herself by her coolness and efficiency, and always volunteered for the most dangerous tasks. She was nine months underground.

'She was recommended for, but did not receive, the M.C. and the M.B.E.'

'Beekman, Yolande Marie, née Unternährer. Born 28 October 1911. Born in Paris. W/T Operator to Tell, in the St. Quentin area.

'Field name: Mariette. Documentary name: Yvonne de Chauvigny. Left for field 17 September 1943. Landed in neighbourhood of Tours, and obliged to make the dangerous journey alone via Paris to Lille carrying her W/T equipment.

'For four months she carried out her hazardous work in this very difficult and dangerous region, and by her efficiency and devotion to her work made possible the delivery of arms and explosives to the Resistance forces controlled by her organizer. She showed great courage and coolness in the face of the constant dangers and risks she underwent.'

At this juncture I was also able to add the notes on Mademoiselle Gobeaux that I print in Chapter XIV. I think it better to give them there, so that they may be fresh in the mind of the reader when I describe my meeting with Mademoiselle Gobeaux in St. Quentin.

'Plewman, Eliane Sophie. Father British; Mother Spanish. Maiden name: Browne-Bartroli. Born 6 December 1917. Operational name: Dean. Documentary name: Eliane Jacqueline Prunier. Field name: Gaby.

'Courier to Bernard, Marseilles region. Her brother, Albert Browne-Bartroli, also in French Section. Worked in field with Charles Milne Skepper, alias Henri Edouard Truchot, operational name Monk, and Arthur Steel, alias Arthur Saulnier, operational name Waiter. Left for field the night of the 13/14 August 1943, landed by parachute. Her mission was to establish, with Monk, a new circuit in Marseilles.

'On her arrival in the field, Plewman was for a time separated from her organizer, but eventually succeeded in joining the circuit. She carried out several liaison missions for her chief, and made contact with various local Resistance groups, supplying them with arms and equipment. Her calm and efficient courier work was of great value. Plewman was arrested 23 March 1944 following the arrest of Monk and other members of the circuit. She was cruelly used, but gave away no names.

'Charles Skepper ("Monk") was seen in prison at Compiègne in July 1944.

'After her arrest, Plewman passed through the prison of les Baumettes in Marseilles.

'She was apparently dropped in the neighbourhood of Lons le Saunier.'

'Damermont, Madeleine. Code name: Dancer. Name used in U.K. for security purposes: Dussautoy. Field name: Solange. Cover name: Martine Jacqueline Duchâteau. Circuit code name: Bricklayer.

'Born 11 November 1917. Left for field 29 February 1944 by parachute. To work in the area Paris-Rennes as a courier to Bricklayer.

'Damermont, accompanied by her organizer Anthelme, alias Joseph Dumontet, alias Renaud, alias Bricklayer, and Captain Lionel Lee, a W/T operator, alias Jacques Lionel Heriat, alias Mechanic, were dropped by parachute in the neighbourhood of Rambouillet to a reception committee organized so it was thought in London by one Phono. This is very strange, for in *Madeleine* Miss Fuller has identified Phono as Captain Garry, who had been arrested the previous autumn, on 18 October 1943 to be precise.

'His circuit having been penetrated by the Germans, it was therefore known to them that a plane from England would drop agents and arms by parachute at a prescribed place and on a certain date. It was even known that the aircraft in question was due to leave London at 21.00 hours, and the Germans were able, therefore, to arrange what was, from their point of view, an appropriate reception for it. The plane duly arrived, and three people were dropped, together with a supply of arms. After a fight, all were arrested and taken to the Avenue Foch. The entire supply of arms fell into the hands of the Germans.¹

'Captain Henri Garry had worked with Noor Inayat Khan, alias Madeleine, and it seems certain, therefore, that Mademoiselle Damermont's arrest and subsequent death were due to the successful use the Germans made of Madeleine's W/T set.

'She had been arrested a short while before Garry, but it would seem that in February of the following year this was not realized in London, for agents were still being dropped at that time to reception committees organized, so it was thought, by Garry.

'Unless, as has been suggested to me—and this is a truly dreadful theory—London was engaged in a game of double bluff: that is to say, it had known very well that the Poste Madeleine had been taken over by the Germans, and was busily feeding to it false information to deceive the enemy. More than this, in order to convince the Germans that London believed the Poste Madeleine was still in British

¹ This incident near Rambouillet is well remembered by a number of people in France still living who were concerned in it.

hands, London was prepared to send agents deliberately to a reception committee organized by the Germans, so as to maintain the deception.'

(I have been unable to confirm whether this was in fact the case; a number of people including officers of S.O.E. believe it was; on the other hand, the point has also been made that such action would demand a logical and cruel ruthlessness such as the British never employ, even in war. I will only say that there is evidence that London knew that Noor Inayat Khan and Garry had been arrested in the autumn of 1943 and that their transmissions were subsequently controlled by the Germans. London continued to exchange signals with them for what seemed to be sound reasons.)

Those, then, were my notes. I was by this time concerned as to the identity of the fourth woman murdered at Natzweiler. It could not, in view of the evidence of Captain Stonehouse and Dr. Boogaerts given at the Natzweiler Trial, be disputed that there had been four victims and it seemed very odd that whereas the identity of three of them—Diana Rowden, Andrée Borrell and Vera Leigh—had been quickly established from the records of Karlsruhe prison, nothing was known about the fourth.

When efforts were first being made to determine the fate of these women shortly after the war ended, it was at one stage thought that the fourth woman had been Noor Inayat Khan; further researches proved that this was not the case. Miss Inayat Khan was taken separately to Germany, was imprisoned in Pforzheim, not Karlsruhe, and joined Yolande Beekman, Madeleine Damerment and Eliane Plewman in September 1944, only on the journey that was to end in Dachau, and death.

If the fourth was not Noor Inayat Khan, who was it? All Vera Atkins could tell me was that she had not been sent to France by S.O.E. I was not to discover her identity for another eight months, but from this time onward I determined to write the story not of the six who died, but of the seven; for that there had been seven I could no longer doubt.

CHAPTER VII

SHORTLY AFTER I had compiled these rough notes I was able to obtain the full story of the last days of Yolande Beekman, Eliane Plewman and Madeleine Damerment. I got this from two different sources and I was vaguely disquieted that whereas the depositions made in connection with the murder of these women were available, there were none in connection with the murder of Vera Leigh, Andrée Borrell, Diana Rowden and the unknown fourth victim. This might or might not, I thought, be significant. It might be chance; it might be that the mystery concerning the fourth woman who died at Natzweiler had been deliberately encompassed.

Jerrard Tickell, it was true, had said that only six women had accompanied Odette Churchill on her journey from Fresnes in May 1944, and he had given their names. But this was, after all, an insignificant detail in his book and it might well have been that he listed only the six whose identity had been established.

Depositions made comparatively shortly after the events in question were definite that there were eight women in the party; the eighth was, moreover, identified as Noor Inayat Khan. Erroneously identified as I have said in the previous chapter. The mistake arose, Vera Atkins has told me, because Mrs. Churchill thought she could identify a photograph of Miss Inayat Khan as one of the women who had travelled with her. That such a mistake might be made is easily comprehensible; but as six of the party had been positively identified and Mrs. Churchill believed the seventh member had been Noor Inayat Khan, it would seem to be established that the party had, with Mrs. Churchill herself, totalled eight.

In the report of the Natzweiler Trial, the evidence was quite definite that eight women were involved. Having given the names of Andrée Borrell, Diana Rowden and Vera Leigh, whose murder was the subject of the trial, the report continued: 'All three were sent to Karlsruhe Gaol for women in the Riefstahlstrasse on 13 May 1944 together with five other women who had been arrested in France while engaged on similar work.'

In the opening speech for the prosecution, Major Hunt, Legal Staff Officer, Office of the Judge Advocate General, said:

'Some time prior to May 1944, eight women in the employ of the British military authorities were sent to France on certain special missions. . . . At various places at various times these women were

apprehended by the German authorities . . . and were from then on prisoners in the hands of the Germans . . . all eight were transferred to and confined in Karlsruhe prison.

' . . . On a day in July 1944, and there is considerable evidence to show that this was 6 July, very early in the morning they were woken in their cells and four of these women, namely Miss Andrée Borrell, Section Officer Diana Rowden, Miss Vera Leigh and a fourth woman whose identity has unfortunately not been established, were ordered to prepare themselves for a journey. . . . '

One may, I believe, accept without question the authenticity of the material given to those officers who conducted the prosecution at the Natzweiler Trial, and it is therefore clear that the fourth woman murdered at Natzweiler was believed to have been in the employment of the British.

Whereas I obtained no depositions concerning the women put to death at Natzweiler, the gap is in part filled by the very full report of the trial of those responsible. This would be the proper place to give, as summarized in *The Natzweiler Trial*, the story of the last days of those who were murdered.

All three (Vera Leigh, Diana Rowden and Andrée Borrell) were, as I have said, sent to Karlsruhe gaol for women on 13 May 1944 together with five comrades. It is not known precisely why these women were transferred to Karlsruhe, but the Karlsruhe Gestapo was instructed by the Reichssicherheitshauptamt Berlin (R.S.H.A., the headquarters of the Gestapo) to take delivery of the eight women and to hold them. They were delivered to prison by one Laengle of the Karlsruhe Gestapo, with instructions that they were to be held 'in protective custody'. Their arrival caused some disturbance, for the prison was only a civilian women's prison, and it had no facilities for guarding political prisoners, in respect of whom special instructions had been received regarding their safe custody in separate cells. And so after some weeks, the Chief Wardress, Becker, approached the Prison Governor with a request for instructions. The Governor accordingly wrote to the head of Abteilung IV.3 of the Karlsruhe Gestapo, whose deputy had signed the instructions to the prison. Abteilung IV, under Dr. Farber, was responsible for counter-espionage and anti-sabotage, as well as for all measures against activities against the State. A letter was sent to R.S.H.A., Berlin, asking what was to be done about these women, and eventually a teletype message concerning four of the women was received by the head of the Karlsruhe Gestapo,

Gmeiner, instructing him to arrange for their execution at a convenient camp. Roesner, the head of section 3, responsible for counter-espionage and anti-sabotage, was ordered to make the necessary arrangements and he chose Natzweiler. Gmeiner agreed.

'Between 4 and 5.30 a.m. on 6 July 1944 Wassmer and Harberg, two of the subordinates in Abteilung IV.3, conducted Andrée Borrell, Diana Rowden, Vera Leigh and the fourth girl to Natzweiler. Here Wassmer saw the Camp Commandant, Hartjenstein, and various other camp officials and handed over the women, together with a copy of the movement order and the *Vollzugszettel*—the execution order—received from R.S.H.A., Berlin. Wassmer then left, having requested that Karlsruhe Gestapo be informed when the execution had taken place.

'The *Vollzugszettel* did not specify why, where nor how the execution was to take place. Natzweiler was chosen because it was the most convenient concentration camp to Karlsruhe, although it was a camp for men only.

'Neither Gmeiner nor Roesner nor Wassmer nor any other member of the Gestapo took any steps to find out whether these women had been tried and legally condemned to death nor to acquaint them with their impending fate, in case they wished to appeal or to lodge a protest. Indeed, it was clear from statements made by members of the Karlsruhe Gestapo who had been interrogated that they were fully aware that there had been no legal proceedings in respect of the women and that they were not under sentence of death. Yet the orders were accepted and carried out without question and under a cloak of secrecy. The victims were carefully kept in ignorance of their fate. At Natzweiler, no official visited them to apprise them of their impending executions. Even at the last, when one of the women asked why she was being injected, she was told it was an inoculation against typhus.

'The party arrived at Natzweiler at about three o'clock in the afternoon of 6 July 1944. They were seen by a number of other prisoners; it was somehow learnt that they were British and French. Lt.-Commander O'Leary and the Belgian, Dr. Boogaerts, succeeded in making a very brief contact with two of the girls whose cells faced the infirmary. As the afternoon wore on it became apparent that some unusually sinister business was afoot. The authorities ordered all prisoners to be in their huts by 8 p.m., to put up the black-out and not to show their faces at any window. Between 9.30 and 10.30 p.m.

the girls were taken singly from the bunker to the crematorium. There they were injected and immediately cremated. The plea that all concerned were only anxious to act as humanely as possible collapses in view of the fact that nobody took any steps to safeguard the legal rights of the prisoners and that the doctor did not consider it necessary to ascertain what drug he was injecting.

'There is no reason to disbelieve the evidence of Bruttel, the medical orderly of the camp, given in his affidavit, and in evidence, that the only substance which he took with him to the crematorium, in obedience to orders of Dr. Plaza, the Camp Medical Officer, was phenol.

'It must be said that the evidence that any of these women became conscious after the injection is not entirely convincing; though one witness heard screams and therefore assumed that they had recovered consciousness.

'As a result, the Prosecution did not rely upon any suggestion that any of these women had become conscious on being placed in the crematorium, but on the facts that to kill prisoners in this way, without apparently telling them of their fate, without trial, was inhuman and contrary to the laws of war. And this method of execution was chosen by the authorities of the camp, not ordered by Berlin. Berlin had asked for special treatment, a cryptic and euphonious request for execution.'

Of the accused, the camp doctor, who admitted having administered certainly one of the injections, was convicted and sentenced to death; three of the accused were found not guilty of the offences with which they were charged, and the remaining five were found guilty and sentenced to terms of imprisonment varying from life to four years.

Four of these last were, however, subsequently tried for other war crimes, and sentenced to death; two of them had been at Auschwitz, where they had been responsible for countless atrocities.

The full transcript of the evidence at the trial is utterly repellent in content; each one of the guilty sought to incriminate his fellows in order to save his own skin, and this is not surprising for they were men of mean and wretched fibre; but the most macabre and horrid feature of the trial lay not so much in the direct evidence as in the matters that arose out of it; the clear picture that was revealed of men dealing in death, destruction and cruelty as being the ordinary currency of life. At one point, when a witness was in course of cross-examination on the lethal effect of liquid phenol in the human body,

and the manner in which it had been injected into the veins of those unfortunate women, the Judge Advocate was moved to ask:

'I have always assumed that medical etiquette did not provide for doctors killing people, but are you suggesting that there is some etiquette in it? If you kill someone, surely the ordinary medical rules do not apply, do they?'

It was a pertinent question; for the medical evidence suggested that the doctors concerned were very much more anxious to maintain the niceties of medical etiquette than they were anxious as to the ethical and humane correctness of injecting poison into a human vein.

Thus, from the admirable War Crimes Trial series, I was able to establish the manner in which Diana Rowden, Vera Leigh and Andrée Borrell had died; no such material was, however, available to trace the last days of Eliane Plewman, Madeleine Damerment and Yolande Beekman; but I was, as I have said, fortunate in obtaining copies of depositions that gave a full picture.

By June 1946, it had been established that these women were executed in the camp of Dachau in the early hours of 13 September 1944; it is yet another of the very curious features that surround these events that whereas in the Natzweiler Trial, held at Wuppertal in May 1946, the fourth murdered woman was said in evidence to have been unidentified, an official report dated June 1946 still maintained that she was Noor Inayat Khan.

However, let that be. To continue with the time these women spent in Karlsruhe Gaol, there were depositions from Frau Becker and Fraulein Hager, in charge of the women's section, from Fraulein Hedwig Muller, who shared a cell with Madeleine Damerment, whom she knew as Martine Dussautoy, from Frau Else Sauer, who was in Mademoiselle Damerment's cell the night she was fetched away, and who also knew Eliane Plewman by sight and saw her leaving with Mademoiselle Damerment; and from Frau Nina Hagen, who shared a cell with Yolande Beekman.

The two wardresses were contacted by Antony Terry, on my behalf, in March 1956—they clearly remembered their interrogation by a W.A.A.F. officer (Vera Atkins) in 1946, and said she had been horrid to them, adding words to the effect that they had never done no one any harm nohow, and it was not their fault that the prison was overcrowded.

This may or may not be true. On the other hand, it is certain that at that time Vera Atkins had spent grim and gruesome months

combing through noisome prisons, cells and horror camps in search of men and women who had been well known to her personally, and she was probably not in a mood to be too picky in her approach to anyone who had been concerned, however innocently, with their imprisonment and death. I would, moreover, stress here that the tracing of these women was the work of Vera Atkins; she was not asked or ordered to do it; by her own persistence she compelled authority to let her do it. That anyone knows today what happened in the end to Vera Leigh, Andrée Borrell, Diana Rowden, Yolande Beckman, Eliane Plewman and Madeleine Damerment is due to Vera Atkins and to her alone.

The other three women who made depositions at the trial had all been political prisoners; Hedwig Muller, after her release, tried very hard to convey news of 'Martine' (Madeleine Damerment) to England, but her letters to a Convent at Hitchin were held by the censors; ultimately she gained contact and, in the autumn of 1955, her letters were lent to me by Reverend Mother Eleanor to whom they had been addressed. Of that, more in its proper sequence.

The evidence collected from these various sources suggested that whilst in Karlsruhe prison the girls were not ill treated; they were put into separate cells which they shared with one or two German prisoners—most of them political rather than criminal prisoners—and there was little doubt that Hedwig Muller, Else Sauer and Nina Hagen struck up a real friendship with them and did everything possible to help them, by sharing food parcels, sending laundry out with theirs to be washed, and so on.

Nevertheless, they had a very hard time and the last survivors became very anxious when first the four girls murdered at Natzweiler and then Odette Churchill disappeared and they were unable to find out where they had gone or why.

They were locked in their cells during the heavy raids on Karlsruhe, and showed amazing courage; they cheered up their cell mates, all of whom spoke of them with the greatest admiration.

Reading this nearly twelve years after those valiant women came face to face with death, the words still have power to tighten the throat with emotion. How strange to sit in a cell in Karlsruhe, and be bombed by the R.A.F. or the U.S.A.A.F.; how terrible to face possible death not at the hands of enemies, but of friends. . . . It must have been peculiarly poignant for Yolande Beckman and Diana Rowden, both of whom had served in the W.A.A.F.; Diana, who

had been attached to a bomber station, must have had some wry thoughts as she sat in her dark, cheerless little cell. She must surely have wondered if the engines that tore the skies above her were controlled by men with whom she had once worked, and laughed and broken bread.

In July she left, she and three others; on the afternoon of 11 September 1944, Frau Becker received instructions to prepare the remaining women of S.O.E. for departure early next morning; she went round each of their cells, returning to them their personal possessions and told them they would be moving next day. At about 1.30 a.m. on 12 September they were called out of their cells by an elderly male warder, who happened to be on night duty, and were taken down to the reception room where they were handed over to officers of the Gestapo. Subsequent interrogation of two of these officers who accompanied the girls to Dachau revealed discrepancies in their respective stories; but in outline this is what happened:

The girls were driven by car, accompanied by three Gestapo officials, two of whom were identified as Kriminalsekretär Wassmer and Ott, to the station of Karlsruhe or to the nearby town of Bruchsal, where they caught an early train to Munich, arriving in the late afternoon. Here they changed trains and caught the last train up to Dachau, some twenty miles north-west of Munich. They arrived after dark and had to walk up to the camp which they reached about midnight. They were handed over there to a camp official, and spent the night in the cells. Between 8 and 10 the next morning, 13 September, they were taken to the crematorium compound and shot through the back of the head; the bodies were immediately cremated. . . .

The evidence that four women made this journey was conclusive, and it seems certain that Noor Inayat Khan, who had been imprisoned in the nearby town of Pforzheim, was the fourth. In her biography, *Madeleine*, Jean Overton Fuller says that according to available records Inayat Khan was fetched from Pforzheim at 6.15 on the evening of 11 September 1944 and taken to Karlsruhe; that is to say, on the same evening that the wardress Becker received orders to prepare her three charges for a journey.

Odette Churchill, the sole survivor of eight women who travelled from Fresnes to Karlsruhe prison, was taken to Ravensbruck concentration camp in mid-July; she was there for ten months.

On 3 May 1945 the commandant, Fritz Suhren, drove her to the American lines; he was arrested, escaped shortly before his trial (in

what have been described to me as rather surprising circumstances; it is said he was put in the charge of German guards), re-arrested in 1949, handed over to the French, tried by them and, Peter Churchill says in *The Spirit in the Cage*, executed.

There is no explanation as to why Odette Churchill, who had received a parody of a trial and been condemned to death, should have been removed to a camp, whereas the remaining seven women who had, so far as is known, never been tried in any way, should have been closely held in a civil prison and, ultimately, been murdered on the direct order of a high-ranking Gestapo officer.

It was indeed, as Jerrard Tickell said in *Odette*, a sardonic twist that Mrs. Churchill, the only one who had officially been condemned to death, should have been the only one to live. One would dearly like to know what strange process of reasoning in the labyrinth of German officialdom could have led to so paradoxical a result.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THIS PERIOD, the wheels seemed to turn very slowly; I was in much confusion of mind, a state in which I have remained to this day where much of the matter in this book is concerned. I was then writing many letters, seeking anxiously to contact anyone who might possibly add to my knowledge; later in my quest, whilst I did not regret this fevered and largely fruitless activity, I realized how abortive it must necessarily have been.

Indeed, I did not, I think, gain a single useful fact from any of the people whom I importuned so shamelessly; in most cases, it was because they had nothing to tell me. In a few, I learnt nothing because the impulse to assist me was not there. I was, then, still a novice, still innocently believing that no impediment would prevent anyone assisting me who could; later, I came to understand that knowledge would come not from these chance contacts, who had been, in one way or another, concerned with S.O.E. during its operational days; friends and relations were the only true source of knowledge and, as I discovered later in France, the people who had known Diana and Vera and Andrée, Eliane and Yolande and Madeleine in the field.

As the days went by, however, some of the letter-writing bore good

fruit; I heard from Tom Plewman, the husband of Eliane, who lived in Leicestershire. He said he would be very pleased if he could help me with my proposed book, and invited me to visit him one week-end. I heard, too, from the British Consul in Madrid, to whom I had written asking if Madame Browne-Bartoli, the mother of Eliane Plewman, still lived at the address where she had dwelt ten years before; he said she did, and I wrote to her.

I also heard from Mr. Clark, whom Vera Leigh had named as her next of kin; his address had been care of a bank, and I had written to the Manager, asking if he were still in contact with this Mr. Clark, and whether a letter would be forwarded. A day or two later, Mr. Clark himself telephoned me; it transpired that he was still an employee of the Bank in question; I invited him to dinner and he accepted.

The next strange chance—and there were many such chances and coincidences as I continued my quest—came a few days later. A friend came to stay for the week-end; I was still in bed with a poisoned leg, and was, therefore, entertaining him, after he had dined, in my bedroom. It chanced that Vera Atkins telephoned me, and I seized the opportunity to have a longish conversation with her about various relevant matters. When I had finished, I felt I owed G some explanation, and told him, briefly, about this book. I mentioned the name Vera Leigh, and he said, 'Vera Leigh, Vera Leigh. . . I knew her. I taught her.'

'Taught her!' I cried, all agog. 'What do you mean, taught her? And where?'

'Oh, during the war,' he replied cagily; 'at a place in Surrey.'

'Wanborough,' I said triumphantly. 'You don't mean to tell me you were an instructor at Wanborough?'

Security at this humble level, ten years later, was still good. Reluctantly, G admitted that it had been at Wanborough. Persistent from my sick-bed, I extracted from him the information that he had taught the arts of demolition and sabotage, and he told me what he remembered of Vera Leigh—he remembered her as vivacious, gay and attractive. He added that she had been curiously obtuse in some matters; some things she had picked up quick as a flash, others, perhaps more simple, had to her presented enormous difficulties. 'I remember,' he said, 'that she found anything to do with maps frightfully difficult—maps and diagrams. We had to work out all sorts of strange methods to get quite simple things into her head. Whereas when it came to

some complicated stuff, such as working out charges and all that, she could do it in her head in no time.'

He told me that he had not been long at Wanborough; he had been posted on to Meoble, on the west coast of Scotland, another of the training establishments. He spoke of his time there with great feeling and sincerity, tinged, I thought, with a true emotion; Meoble is a wild and infinitely remote estate in the neighbourhood of Arisaig. It was chosen, I have been told, for its purpose by reason of its great inaccessibility, and even today no motor road runs to it.

To get there, one must walk to Loch Beoraid over the mountain track from Glenfinnan, or it can be approached from Lochailort; the proprietors of Meoble have a boat which goes down the loch to Morar on alternate days, and this is the sole method of transport. It was by boat, or on foot, that the trainees of S.O.E. reached Meoble.

As G talked, I sensed that something of the wild austerity of this ferocious country had touched him, and he still remembered his days there with a clarity time had done nothing to dim. At that stage, I knew nothing of Vera Leigh's life before the war; when, later, I realized she had been connected with high fashion in Paris, his words came back to me with added poignancy. War is a strange master; it seemed incredible that this sophisticated Parisienne had made grueling marches over those steep and isolated and heather-crustured hills. I could not guess what impulse it had been that had persuaded her to volunteer for such grim and hazardous enterprises.

This was a facet of Vera Leigh unrevealed to me as I lay in my bed that hot July week-end, and listened to G as he spoke of the days distant by twelve years when he had been an instructor at Meoble. When, at last, I let him go to his bed, sucked of all knowledge, I lay awake for a long time thinking of the things he had said.

Pain is a shrewd sharpener of imagination, and that night I was in pain. London lay still and hot and heavy, and thick with summer, and there was in it a quality that put me in mind of summers I had known in Paris in the halcyon days.

I wondered if, by chance, I had ever met Vera Leigh, at a party, or dinner, or cocktail session; if I had brushed shoulders with her at Auteuil or Longchamps or Maisons Laffitte, if we had perhaps sat side by side at a narrow table in a Parisian restaurant.

I reflected that Tom Plewman lived in Leicestershire, within a few miles of one of my closest friends, who had been at school with me and with Diana Rowden. They might so easily have met, and never have

known that the wife of one had been for months imprisoned with the school friend of the other; life, I thought, lying restless on my hot and comfortless bed, must be full of such chance and unknown meetings. A few days later I was to know that I had bought hats from a shop owned in part by Vera Leigh. . . .

Next morning G came in to see me, and said, 'I remembered after I went to bed that Vera was extremely good with her fingers; she could do fiddling jobs with charges and wires and all that remarkably quickly and neatly. I have an idea that she may have been connected in some way with the fashion business; I think she was very interested in clothes, and hated her hideous khaki uniform.'

G, alas, died untimely a few weeks after our meeting; I never told him that he had been right in this impression.

A fortnight later, on 21 July, I went down to Beaulieu to visit, if I could, some of the houses that had been used by S.O.E. for the final stages of training. I had arranged to go on to Alton, and from there drive to see Mrs. Rowden.

I went first to Ower, on the edge of the Forest, and Lord Montagu drove me over to Beaulieu the following morning. It was a lovely day, and the forest spread grateful layers of shade across the narrow road; the Palace rose grey and beautiful against the brilliant sky, and I remembered something I had been told by a man who had himself been trained there.

He too had worked for the French Section, had been taken by the Germans, suffered atrocious torture, and passed to Buchenwald, where he had survived unimaginable horror. He had spoken of Beaulieu with gratitude, for the store of truth and beauty it had left in him, that he could draw upon for strength and comfort in the evil days.

It is not easy, for those of us whose war was always clean and clear, to imagine what life in Buchenwald was; but it is possible to understand, in part, what memory of a place like Beaulieu must have meant to those who were degraded to the status of the meanest animal. Filthy, starving, sick, tormented and hopeless, it yet represented hope; it was an emblem of sanity and strength and simple kindness; it renewed belief, battered almost to oblivion, that the cause was good and the conflict just; that it was to preserve always such tranquil loveliness as survived in the New Forest that torment must be endured and beastliness overcome.

There, in those circumstances of unbelievable misery, Beaulieu remained inviolate and cleanly; the mind held the picture of a river

curling gently on its azure passage through the thick, green meadows; the tall trees of the forest with the moss damp and cool and sweet beneath them; the ancient stone nobly fashioned and rising straight from the honest Hampshire earth; the church where silence lapped softly against the great timbers of the nave. . . .

In the end they went, all of them, to Beaulieu; for them it was the last memory of England, and one that was strong and true and good. It cannot have been the design of those who chose it for its purpose that this should be so; indeed, at dinner that night, I sat next to the General whose home had been hard by the Palace, and who told me he had himself suggested the houses on the estate to the War Office as suitable training centres; he had suggested them because he knew them, and he knew them to be, as was desired, remote and inaccessible. But whatever the motive, the end was felicitous. It enabled all those who worked for S.O.E to spend their last days in England in surroundings that gave, to some at least, an inviolate inner peace.

At luncheon, I met Mrs. Pleydell-Bouverie, Lord Montagu's mother, who had been at Beaulieu during the war; she had met many of the training staff, but none of the trainees. Their ways were secret and unknown, and she had, of course, asked no questions. She had never, consciously, even seen one of them; they arrived by night and they left by night; their dwellings were rigorously guarded. She was surprised and, I think, touched when I told her that the church, lying close by the Palace and part of its precincts, had been used by some of the men and women who had led secret lives in the lands that belonged to her son; I told her how one had told me that on his last day in Beaulieu he had gone to that church and, alone in a warm and somnolent half-light, had prayed—for what, he said, he was not sure. . . . He was not, as he put it, a praying type; but he had gone there compelled by some strong emotion that sought outlet, to pray, he thought, for resolution and for courage and for strength to endure whatever burdens might be laid upon him.

His history, if those were indeed the supplications of his prayer, proves that it was answered in full and perfect measure.

In the afternoon, Edward Montagu drove me to some of the houses that had been used by French Section; the House by the Shore, the House in the Woods, Rings. . . . Rings was abandoned and desolate. No one had lived there since the War Office handed it back, and time had worked cruelly on the garden and the fabric of the house itself. We forced a narrow passage up what had once been the drive, then almost

...and came to the front door; we had borrowed the key from a lodge-keeper, and passed into the house itself.

There was nothing there, nothing; nothing to show what it had been, nor what valiant material had once been sheltered by its walls. Nothing, save the number painted on each door and, on one wall, the remnants of an Underground map of London that had once been stuck to the surface and imperfectly removed.

It had been torn away by an impatient hand, for which the London Underground, Piccadilly to Earl's Court and White City to Oxford Circus were still part of a real and tangible world; the body that held the hand had lived still and breathed, had torn down the map and left the black-out flapping forlornly from the windows, packed the kitbag and gone for good, back to a civilian world of lights and trains and offices, pubs and cinemas and Sunday mornings lying late in bed; and some others, who had passed by Rings and gone out to penetrate the dark night of France, were no longer interested in the London Underground. They would not look at a map again, to see how best to travel from Charing Cross to Kew on a fine May day when the lilac would be in flower; the map for them was as valueless as the few shreds of paper that still clung to the musty wall ten years after the war had ended.

I walked through the house, peering into bedrooms and bathrooms and box-rooms; dust everywhere and sadness and decay; the windows cracked and the plaster crumbled and the wood eaten with the mould of winter; nothing was there, not even the intangible presence of a ghost. All life had been drained from it, and it lay dead and dusty, with the finger of time pressed heavily upon it.

We drove to Buckler's Hard, and to the seashore, where the sea pinks spread in brilliant harmony across the close-cropped turf; the Solent glistened in the light of a strong sun, and on the other side lay, I knew, the land of France.

Almost due south, less than 100 miles away, lay Cap Barfleur and the Cherbourg Peninsula, and beyond them the rich fields of Normandy, and the beaches of D-Day; the women agents, I had been told, had been lodged in the House by the Shore. I wondered if they too had looked out on the hostile waters of the Channel and thought how narrow was the margin that separated them from their warm beds in Hampshire and the enemy-infested territory they were soon to penetrate.

I was due, that July day in 1955, soon to make passage to France, and

I reflected as I stood on the shore, the sea pinks thick around my feet, how different my journey would be. I thought of Diana, who might have walked the same tracks twelve years before, and her flight by Lysander through a dangerous night; and I thought of the plane that would soon carry me, and a friend and her car in bright daylight from Kent to le Touquet. I wished that Diana, and all her comrades, might have lived to know again the pleasures of a pacific France.

That night, a performance of *Twelfth Night* was given in the moonlit cloisters; it was a scene of great beauty and peace, and the voices of the singers were carried clear and sweet across the smooth-rolled lawn. Once again I was filled with a sense of deep humility; I was profoundly conscious that men and women had died monstrous deaths so that I might sit, on a warm and moonlit summer night, and watch these players move against the grey stone walls of Beaulieu.

Later, as I lay reading in a four-posted bed, the French connection became clearer: Beaulieu was founded in 1204, and built by Cistercian monks from Cîteaux in Burgundy. Its name, *Bellus Locus*, was translated into Norman French as Beaulieu, 'a fair place'. Dr. Rose Graham, an eminent authority on monastic history, has said there can be no doubt that the Abbey was built by Frenchmen; and, by what I thought a curious coincidence, its plan was the same as that of the great monastery of Clairvaux, dedicated in 1174. It was at Clairvaux—another Clairvaux—that Diana Rowden was arrested. Cîteaux itself, the Mother Abbey of Beaulieu, lies in the territory where she worked clandestinely in 1943.

In all this, I found a strong and comforting chain of good association; it seemed fitting that Diana, and Vera Leigh, Eliane Plewman and Yolande Beekman, Madeleine Damerment and Andrée Borrell should, during their last weeks in England, have drawn nourishment from a soil so closely linked with the glory of France.

When I turned out my light I lay awake for a long time in the darkness, thinking of these things. I remembered that, after dinner, someone had mentioned that the Abbey was said to be haunted; that sometimes the voices of the monks could be heard singing in the ruined cloisters. It was said that the monks had even been seen, once by a dour sergeant, stationed there during the war, who, driving along in his jeep, had come across a group of them and had asked for directions. . . . Whether this was indeed true I could not say; but, alone in that vast four-poster I felt a slight uneasiness. I wondered if the ghosts of more

recent inhabitants, the murdered victims of our own great carnage, might still return to the places they had loved.

Next day all such nonsensical ideas were dissipated by a piercing sun. After luncheon, I was driven through the Forest to Brockenhurst, and took train to Alton; I was, at last, on my way to meet Mrs. Rowden.

CHAPTER IX

I SPENT THAT NIGHT with friends who live some four miles from Alton, and drove next day to see Mrs. Rowden, who lives in a tall white house which stands on the roof of Hampshire. It is called Telegraph House, and was one of a chain of semaphore stations built to convey news of the Napoleonic fleet from the Channel coast to the Admiralty. In this too I found coincidence; it seemed strange that the mother of Diana Rowden should live in a house built to carry tidings to Whitehall of a hostile France.

Mrs. Rowden, happily, lives today; she will read these words, and that imposes a certain restraint. I will say, simply, that in these years when we have met and corresponded I have come to feel for her a deep affection, allied with a warm admiration for her brave and richly varied personality.

My memories of Diana had led me to imagine her mother to be a slight, reticent, extremely neat person; I saw her—for she had told me she suffered greatly from arthritis and moved abroad only once a year to visit the dentist—sitting dressed, perhaps, in black velvet, in a delicate rosewood chair, white-haired, frail and remote. She had, it was true, told me jovially in a letter that I must be prepared for a somewhat confused establishment, which she referred to, with fine candour, as 'squalor corner'. Remembering the extreme neatness of all Diana's personal affairs at a time when I was constantly in trouble for my own untidiness, I could not credit this, and I was, therefore, ill-prepared for reality.

Mrs. Rowden came to greet me on the drive and I saw that she was not, in appearance, frail, white-haired or delicate. She was built in an heroic mould, and stoutly and appropriately attired for hard work in the garden; she waved a stick in greeting and in that moment my anxieties disappeared. I realized, as I got out of the car and greeted her,

that I had been a little frightened. I had pictured her living remote in an ivory castle, and I feared to breach the walls; the moment I saw her I knew that she lived in no rarefied world, but was strongly, deeply entrenched in a good and earthy garden.

Dear Mrs. Rowden—we talked for hours, and she showed me photographs, and we wandered through the garden, and all was ease and understanding and kindness. The picture she gave me of Diana was far removed from that which I had myself formed; to this day, I cannot understand how the face Diana showed to her school friends should have differed so greatly from the face her mother knew.

I had known her as shy, reticent, neat and urban. Mrs. Rowden spoke of her as turbulent, tomboy, the boon companion of two brothers, living a beach-combing life along the Mediterranean coast, a passionate devotee of boats and fishing and the sea.

In the early 'twenties Mrs. Rowden had taken her three children to France, and there they had lived for many years with a yacht called appropriately, *Sans Peur*. For a time they had an anchorage at St. Jean Cap Ferrat, they had drifted along the Italian Riviera, they had paused a while near Menton. . . . They had lived in and on the sea, and had, it seemed to me, led an entirely lovely life.

The only blemish for Diana had come in the late 'twenties, when her mother decided she should have some English schooling. She took a house at Hadlow Down, near Mayfield, and there met the Phelps family, who lived at Five Ashes; Bridget Phelps, as she then was, is today my friend, and it was because she was at school at the Manor House that Diana was sent there. She hated it; this may, perhaps, explain in part why her personality appeared transmuted into something alien. She hated school bitterly, and longed for the yacht and the sea and the warm sun of the Mediterranean and her raffish, careless, unpredictable companions.

I had shared a bedroom with her, and had got not one hint of this. To me she had been sophisticated and poised; I cannot, even now, visualize her as a sea urchin.

Mrs. Rowden, of course, must be believed. . . . She painted a picture of a honeyed life, and her devotion to fishing endeared her to me even more. She told me that Diana would lie, sleeping on deck, with a line tied round her big toe to wake her should it be jerked by a fish; she described her gutting fish with cheerful competence, marketing, carousing, sailing a small boat with reckless skill.

I sat, metaphorically, with my mouth open; and then we walked

round the garden, together with the Italian Vincenzo, Mrs. Rowden's faithful manservant, whom her son had searched for, found, and rescued in Italy after the war and had brought back to Hampshire. Vincenzo was perfect; and in that wind-swept, open garden he had created something of Italy. It was in the besoms he had made to sweep the drive, in the clay bowls and urns he had moulded to decorate the walls, in the very vegetables that, together with Mrs. Rowden, he contrived to grow. The sitting-room was full of seed-boxes, sheltering from the English summer; and outside there were aubergines and garlic and melon cucumbers and an Italianate profusion of tomatoes, carnations and sweet herbs, as well as beans and peas and raspberries and gooseberries.

It was a lovely garden; and in it I thought Mrs. Rowden had created something that was truly a reflection of her own personality, and of the happy days before tragedy smashed heavily across her world.

I asked her about the early days of the war, and she said she and Diana had both been in France; Diana joined the French Red Cross and, in the desperate weeks of 1940, became separated from her. Ultimately, Mrs. Rowden had herself escaped from France in a coal-boat; Diana had stayed behind, of her own choice, believing it was her duty to continue with her work. It was not until 1941 that she escaped through Spain and Portugal to England.

She shared, then, a flat in Kensington with her mother; but the desire to return to France was always there. At once she sought work where her knowledge of France and French would be of value; but, like so many others, she was frustrated. So she enrolled in the W.A.A.F.; a few days later, opportunity of a different type of work—work more in keeping with her specialized knowledge—was offered; but it was then too late.

Mrs. Rowden did not know how, or through whom, she had entered the ranks of S.O.E.; five months later I discovered it was through Bill Simpson—Squadron Leader William Simpson, O.B.E., D.F.C.—who wrote the books, *One of Our Pilots is Safe*, *The Way to Recovery* and *I Burned My Fingers*.

She did, however, know the nature of the work for which Diana had enrolled, and attempted to dissuade her. She had failed. . . . While Mrs. Rowden was telling me of this, I glimpsed, for the first time, something of the motives that had impelled Diana and, perhaps, some of her comrades, to return to France. There was in it an element of paradox, for I sensed they had been possessed of a ruthless, reckless

and yet completely controlled hatred of Germany that it should dare violate French earth: and this hatred had its roots in a fierce love, which was love of France.

The motive, then, had perhaps in part been the blending of hatred and love, and that is a powerful stimulant. It was powerful in Diana, and nothing would deflect her from her purpose. The reason she gave her mother why she, herself, was a particularly suitable candidate for clandestine work in France was so deeply personal it would be intolerable to put it down in print; but it confirms that Diana Rowden was an exceptionally clear-thinking, selfless and courageous woman.

All this Mrs. Rowden told me bravely, though it was painfully clear that it was deeply distressing for her to relive the past in this way. Yet she assured me, again and again, that she welcomed my book, that she was glad Diana should get recognition.

It was then she told me how shabbily—the adjective is my choice, not hers—she had been treated; she had thought, perhaps, that, the war over, some of those who had known Diana in France might speak well of her, would give some news of her life there, and of her death. When no one came, nor sent any word, she concluded that her daughter must have failed lamentably in her mission. And this conviction was with her for ten years, until I was able to dispel it.

Already I knew a great deal more than Mrs. Rowden did about Diana's service; and I told her what I knew. I think she found some comfort even in that small knowledge; later, after I had been 'in France, I was able to tell her a great deal more. In reply to the letter I sent her then, she wrote: 'I am so happy to know that all concerned had had pleasant and kindly memories of Diana, and that she left behind such good impressions. Thank you for all you have done. . . .'

My view on this subject had best be briefly and calmly expressed in a few words: it is, simply, my belief that the policy of leaving next of kin in complete ignorance—a policy which, it has been suggested to me, was motivated by kindly concern for their feelings—was mistaken.

So we talked and the sun dipped, and evening came; Vincenzo brought me great boxes packed with fresh peas and beans, with gooseberries and raspberries, and bundles of flowers. The time came to go, and we moved to the door; I wanted to tell Mrs. Rowden what her kindness had meant to me, but the words came ill-expressed on my lips; I know I was profoundly moved by her personality, and

thankful that this meeting had been so happy. It was the first meeting I had had with anyone connected with the women whose story I had been seeking, and I was glad that it had been a friendly one.

As I looked for a last time round that garden, bursting with fruit and flowers and vegetables, I thought how absurdly fragile was human life compared with the things of the soil. Storm comes, and frost and ice and snow, the land is scorched by summer, and drought withers the harvest, the wind can sear and the sun can burn and yet the earth recovers and gives up its yield with the recurring seasons. Only we are mortal: the earth returns to fecundity when the storm has passed, but the dead are dead and will never come back.

CHAPTER X

EVENTS BEGAN TO move more quickly; within a few days Mr. Clark came to dine with me, and we talked about Vera Leigh. Her father, Eugene Leigh, he told me, had been a well-known trainer of racehorses, amongst them the famous Epinard; he was an American by birth and was born at Taylorsville, Illinois. His racing stables were, however, at Maisons Laffitte, just outside Paris, and it was here that Vera lived as a child; her ambition then was to be a jockey.

In the event, her career lay in a very different field; she went to work for the famous firm of Caroline Reboux, and, in 1927, with two friends, she founded *la grande maison* Rose Valois; this name, Mr. Clark told me, had been formed by combining parts of the real names of the three founders—the VA of Valois represented Vera's contribution.

Mr. Clark had himself worked for a number of years before the war in the Paris office of his Bank; he spoke of Vera in those years as being gay, social, independent-minded and very pretty; and yet, I sensed, he had not been at all surprised by her decision to return to France as an agent. Of all the people I met who were related to these women, Mr. Clark was the only one who seemed to have accepted the decision to embark on such hazardous enterprises in a spirit of resignation. I felt—and I hope that this was not impertinent—that he had long since realized that Vera would never accept meekly a quiet, humdrum and routine-filled life, and he therefore accepted

her decision to train for clandestine work as yet another quirk of her unpredictable and fascinating character.

I found this very admirable, for the role of quiet acceptance cannot have been an easy one to play; it is only too comprehensible that the relations of those who worked with S.O.E. should have attempted to dissuade them; I cannot think that I would myself have had the strength and the courage to accept, in the case of someone I loved, such a decision. I am sure I, too, would have played the part of opponent to the scheme. Yet with Vera Leigh, I felt that her decision had been firm, that she was determined, no matter what it cost her, to get back to France, and Mr. Clark had accepted this and had not added to her stresses by seeking to deflect her purpose.

In many ways, she was well-fitted for the job; she had been brought up in France, spoke perfect French, and knew how French people thought, and behaved, and reacted. Danger lay, however, in her vast circle of friends and acquaintances, and it does seem very odd that she was sent to work in Paris, where the risk that she might be recognized would be great. This, I discovered later, was the case also with Eliane Plewman; she had been sent to work in Marseilles, where she was very well known, and she did, indeed, on a number of occasions make chance encounters with people who knew and recognized her.

In Paris Vera, it seems, acted with brave insouciance; she even patronized the *coiffeur* who had dressed her hair before the war and who knew perfectly well that she was English. She too made chance meetings with friends and, indeed, with relations—she met her own brother-in-law in the Gare Saint-Lazare. At first she pretended she did not know him; that she was not Vera Leigh; then, overcome by emotion, she flung herself in his arms.

Then she discovered that he too was involved with the Resistance: he gave shelter to Allied airmen. Of her own work, she told him only that she was in France on a dangerous mission—so dangerous that she could not let her relatives (some of whom remained in France during the Occupation) know that she was in Paris.

After that chance meeting, however, she did all she could to help her brother-in-law and frequently escorted Allied airmen, who had bailed out over France, from their hiding-place in a flat belonging to the Canadian Pacific near the Madeleine to their starting-point on the journey through France and Spain to liberty.¹

This information was contained in a newspaper cutting Mr. Clark

¹ See Prologue, p. 22.

lent to me. He knew little more about her work in Paris during the months before her arrest and, unfortunately, I have been unsuccessful in my attempts to trace this part of her story. She worked for a *réseau* that was completely penetrated by the Germans, her chief, Henri Frager, was murdered in Buchenwald, and few of her honest comrades have, it seems, survived.

Mr. Clark could, however, tell me something of her escape to England in December 1942. After the fall of Paris, in June 1940, she had said farewell to Rose Valois and had left for Lyons; this was where, in 1946, her fiancé was living. Her intention then had been to seek means of returning to England, but instead she found herself drawn into the organization of an escape route for Allied servicemen. So she stayed on in France, working for this cause until, in 1942, she herself had to make use of the route, and crossed over the Pyrenees into Spain. She was interned by Franco for several months, and she did not reach London until the last month of the year.

At once she offered her services. . . . She was accepted for training by French Section, S.O.E., and, six months after she had reached England, she was carried back to France by Lysander.

I was a little taken aback to discover that Mr. Clark had been perfectly informed about her plans and her undertaking; he told me that, the night before she left for France, he and his wife had dined with her and she had spoken frankly of her task. It had been suggested to me that those who trained Vera Leigh had a suspicion that she was secretly terrified at the prospect of her mission in France, a suspicion that served to intensify their admiration for her resolution to carry it through. Mr. Clark gave me a quite different picture; from the way he spoke about that last, intimate evening in a little pub near Hyde Park, I received an impression that Vera had behaved as though she had been on holiday in London and that it was now time to go back to Paris and get on with her work. It all sounded extraordinarily matter-of-fact and unemotional.

It is very possible that the years she had already spent in France—though not, it is true, in Occupied France—had to a certain extent conditioned her to the vastly greater dangers that now lay ahead. I remembered what Colonel Buckmaster had said, when talking of these women agents, that, for all of them, France was home. . . . That was particularly true of Vera Leigh; she had, in fact, only been in England for a few months before her return, and France was, for her, the more familiar country. Nevertheless, as Mr. Clark spoke

I could be moved, all those years later, by the simple picture he created of someone on the brink of perilous enterprise who could still eat and drink and be merry.

A few days later Mr. Clark sent to me his entire file concerning the affairs of Vera Leigh; all the letters from the War Office were there, and all his answers. There were Press cuttings and photographs, and memoranda. The letters I found particularly interesting.

On 27 July 1944—exactly three weeks, as it happened, after Vera Leigh had been murdered and eight months after her arrest—a letter was sent to Mr. Clark telling him that she was missing while on active service. Thirteen months went by, and in August 1945 Mr. Clark wrote to the War Office; he referred to the letter dated 27 July of the previous year, and the last paragraph of his letter read:

'I had hoped that with the cessation of hostilities in Europe you would by now be in a position to give me some further news. I shall be very grateful for any information you can give me.'

This, it seemed to me, was a very reasonable request, and apparently the W.O. thought so too, for an answer came in less than a month. On 21 September a letter was sent to say that there was still no definite news of Vera Leigh, but, it added rather casually, it was now known that she was deported from France to Germany in May 1944, and that she had left the prison of Karlsruhe in July 1944 for an unknown destination.

One might have thought that this information would have been given to Mr. Clark when it was received, not merely when he himself felt at last compelled to seek news; perhaps, however, it had by chance come in during the four weeks that elapsed between the writing of his letter and the despatch of a reply by the W.O.

That organization was, however, busily employed in disembarassing itself of obligations towards S.O.E. personnel. In October came a letter saying that the store-room was being given up, and what should be done with a brown suitcase that Miss Leigh had left in the care of her H.Q.? Mr. Clark dealt with this. In December there was another letter from the W.O. confirming that the suitcase had been deposited in safe-keeping according to Mr. Clark's direction, adding, *en passant*, that the case contained Miss Leigh's last will and testament.

In December there was a letter announcing that the Branch was closing down, and it gave information as to where future inquiries should be addressed and the office that would deal with financial affairs.

The letter went on to say whilst everything possible was being done to trace Miss Leigh, there was still no definite news of her. For the first time the possibility that she might still be alive was conceded as being slim, but it was added that some further time would be allowed before her death would be officially recorded.

Then, on 16 April 1946, came a letter in which Mr. Clark was told that conclusive proof had been received that Vera Leigh had died in Natzweiler.

On 24 May a letter was sent that I found particularly interesting; it referred to the impending trial of those who had murdered Vera Leigh, and went on to suggest that the publication of her name in Press reports of the trial would cause pain to her relations. 'I would', the writer said, 'be only too willing to endeavour to arrange for the suppression of her name from any reports which may be published.'

Replying, Mr. Clark said: 'I have already made known to all members of the family the circumstances in which she met her death and feel that no useful purpose would be gained in suppressing Miss Leigh's name from any reports which may be published.'

'I personally have no objection, and think it would be preferable that the full story should be published rather than that a garbled version should appear in the Press through some indirect source.'

The names were, as I have said, nevertheless suppressed, although Mrs. Rowden and Madame Arend, the sister of Andrée Borrell, also assert definitely that they did not wish this either.

The last letter on the file was the most satisfactory. It was a letter dated 2 October 1946, informing Mr. Clark that Ensign Vera Leigh of the F.A.N.Y. had been awarded a 'King's Commendation for Brave Conduct'. Notification was published in a supplement to the *London Gazette* dated 1 October.

In this connection, I was interested in a cutting from the *Star* Diary dated 2 October 1946, which referred to the fact that the names of the victims of the Natzweiler Trial had been withheld. It continued: 'At the time, I said that these four names should be given to the world and put high in the gallery of fame with Edith Cavell. . . .

'Now one of the four can be so honoured; her name appears in the *London Gazette* today with the posthumous award of the King's Commendation.'

Three years later, in the published report of the Trial, the names of Diana Rowden and Andrée Borrell were also given to the world; but the impact publication made then was small in comparison with

the effect it would have had had the names been published during the course of the proceedings at Wuppertal.

Last of all, I read the 'good news' letters that had been sent to Mr. Clark after Vera had left for France. The last of these was dated 3 May 1944—six months after her arrest—and it said that, according to the most recent news, Miss Vera Leigh was very well; she was in fact then in Fresnes and, a week later, was to be moved to Karlsruhe.

I noticed that after her arrest, the formula of these letters changed. Before that, when London was, one assumes, genuinely in touch with her, the letters said, 'We continue to receive excellent news of Miss Vera Leigh'; that dated 9 December 1943 (she was arrested on 19 November) took the form: 'According to our most recent news she is very well.'

This was, no doubt, strictly speaking true; but ambiguous.

After I had read these papers, I had some correspondence with Mr. Clark, in the course of which he casually made the remarkable revelation that in 1944, shortly before he had received the letter from the War Office telling him that Vera was missing, he had had a letter from his father (then interned in St. Denis) which reported that 'Doris's half-sister was well, but having a rest'. Doris's half-sister was Vera. His father, Mr. Clark continued, was only allowed one letter a month, and that usually took a month to reach England, so the family in France must have known about Vera's arrest at least a couple of months before the War Office.

The answer to this is, no doubt, that London knew very well that Vera had been arrested, but, in accordance with her wishes, had not told her next of kin; but if this is so there is a horribly macabre element in Mr. Clark's description of the interview he had at the W.O. 'They could only tell me', he wrote, 'that they had no news and thought she might be lying low somewhere. I told them of my father's message, which convinced them that she must be under arrest.'

There is a touch of the farcical in this picture of a private citizen in wartime England receiving news of a captured agent through his father interned in a French prison, and passing it on to the H.Q. of the agent, where it is greeted with astonishment.

Yet from all this something of Vera Leigh's personality had arisen, clear and sharp; she was very much older than her comrades—she was forty-one when she died—and whereas the others had chosen danger in youth, she accepted it in middle age.

This, I think, was the quality Mr. Clark had revealed to me; not of middle age, for Vera Leigh, I am persuaded, was irrevocably young in spirit, but of maturity. In what he told me of Vera, of her life and her training in England and her approach to her impending departure for France in 1943, he had drawn a picture of a woman, capable and poised, who had engaged to play a dangerous role, not with the impetuous ardour of youth, but with the deliberate decision of a woman who knew what she had to do and was going to do it.

CHAPTER XI

TEN DAYS AFTER my dinner with Mr. Clark, I went up to Lutterworth to spend, on his invitation, a couple of nights with Tom Plewman. He had kindly offered to meet me in Rugby, and one warm and lovely evening I joined the Master Cutler at Marylebone Station.

The country was heavy with summer as we swept northward, some of the fields already stripped of their harvest, and the sky untouched by cloud. Behind my window, I could sense the rich fulfilment of the land, lying emptied now and yet triumphant as a woman after childbirth.

Never before, I said to myself, had I been so fully conscious of England as I was that summer when I was engaged in tracing the story of seven women who had died for her; the knowledge of their death was with me always, a debt that I could never now redeem.

So we came to Rugby, and Tom Plewman drove me home to Lutterworth, to the village where John Wycliffe first translated the Bible into English; and where, nearly six centuries later, Sir Frank Whittle and his small team of engineers built and tested the first gas turbine aircraft engine.

The next day, I talked with Tom Plewman about his wife, Eliane; he had looked out many papers for me, and later I sat alone to read them. Until that day I had known nothing of Eliane Plewman; when it closed, I knew her as a brilliant personality that had briefly and vividly illuminated the lives of all who met her.

Her father, I learnt, had been an Englishman domiciled most of his life in Marseilles, where Eliane was born and spent her childhood,

though she was, for a time, at school in England. She had two brothers; one, Albert, had himself worked for S.O.E. and had won a D.S.O.; the other had died, untimely, in England not long before the war broke out.

French born of an English father, the three children had a choice of adopting French or British nationality, and all three had chosen to be British. I conceived a picture of three excessively individualistic characters, and this, so far as Eliane was concerned, was an impression that time only served to strengthen. She must, I think, have been a woman of quite exceptional personality; she was only twenty-six when she died, and yet all those I subsequently met who had known her remembered her as a strong and poised and entirely adult character. When, four months later, I met her brother Albert in Madrid, I thought that I had perhaps caught in him a reflection of his dead sister; he seemed in many ways to embody those qualities of reckless courage—in paradox, one might say a controlled wildness—that so many people had sensed in Eliane.

Tom Plewman told me an anecdote that had been reported to him by a German woman, who had been a political prisoner in Karlsruhe and had met there his wife. The Germans, she said, had suggested to Eliane that life might be a great deal easier for her if she would consent to work for them; this suggestion Eliane had not at once indignantly and finally rejected. She had suggested that the proposal required consideration, and it was difficult to consider carefully on an empty stomach. If her gaolers would take her out for a rich dinner, she would be in a better position to consider their offer on its merits.

She got the dinner, and then said that the idea of working for the Nazis did not appeal to her.

This story explains what I have in mind when I write of a controlled wildness; she was prepared, even when defenceless and in grave danger, to make fools of her captors. And, in making fools of them, she served herself to the extent of gaining a good meal.

This is a quality bred in the character; it cannot later be acquired, nor, indeed, is there anything in Eliane Plewman's upbringing and life before the war to suggest that she was cast in such a mould. Her schooling in England over, she went back to Spain to be 'finished'—a curious process, indeed—and when completed she took herself back to England and got herself a job with a firm of importers in Leicester, where she dealt with correspondence to and from South America, for she spoke perfect Spanish as well as French and English.

why she went to Leicester I could not discover; but it was there, not long before the outbreak of war, that she met her future husband. Very soon, he realized that he wanted to marry her; but he had not then completed his professional training and felt unable properly to support a wife.

This Leicester episode I find hard to fit into the picture of Eliane Plewman; and by that I mean, of course, the decision to leave France and Spain, the countries she knew best, and settle down in Leicester, a town that may indeed have many admirable features but is singularly unlike the sunny south.

I asked Tom Plewman where Eliane had lived in those days, and he told me she had found lodgings in the suburb of Oadby; he gave me the precise address, and two days later, when I had left Lutterworth and was staying with a friend then living herself in Leicester, I asked her to drive me to see the house.

So we went together that evening, this friend who had also known Diana Rowden and I, to look at the little house where Eliane Plewman, who had shared captivity with Diana, had once lodged.

It was entirely unexceptional, a small, unpretentious house, of the type run up by the hundred thousand in the years between the wars, standing at the end of a little cul-de-sac, proudly named a Drive, with tangled flowers growing in the garden and a narrow tree shedding a slender shade.

How strange, I thought, standing there in the glow of the setting sun—how strange that a woman of the great gifts bestowed on Eliane Plewman should have chosen to leave the warm, familiar ambience of the south, where her roots lay and all her childhood friends were gathered, and come to this little house in a suburb of Leicester, to work there, monotonously, in a factory office. This was something inexplicable and, it seemed, out of context. The key might, perhaps, lie in some deeply personal conflict; in a desire to cut free, for a while, from familiar surroundings.

The fact remained: here she had lived, and had lived until war started. Then she went back to Spain, and gained employment with the British Embassy in Madrid; later with the Embassy in Lisbon. Tom Plewman joined the Army and, still feeling he was unable adequately to provide for a wife, let Eliane go without making any attempt to obtain from her a formal engagement.

The bond between them, however, was firm; in April 1942 Eliane managed to transport herself once more to England and found

herself another job, this time with the Spanish Section of the Ministry of Information.

She was, Tom Plewman said, much changed; Leicester she had, frankly, found dull. Now, after thirty months in Spain and Portugal, she had come back self-assured, poised, possessed of a quality that made all heads turn towards her when she entered a room. With self-assurance had come the full unfolding of her beauty.

Tom Plewman's circumstances, too, were changed; he had been commissioned in January 1942, and the financial difficulties that had so long seemed an impediment to marriage had been cleared away. It remained only for Eliane to decide whether, indeed, she wanted marriage, and she decided she did. The wedding took place in Kensington on 28 July 1942, when Eliane was twenty-four and when she had just two years of life left to her. A year and sixteen days after her marriage she was dropped by parachute into France.

I have not discovered how or exactly when Eliane Plewman first gained contact with S.O.B. nor why she made her decision to return as an agent to France. Her husband tells me that she hated the Germans violently, and the Occupation of France was a constant and deeply personal source of anguish to her; this, I think, must have been the food that nourished her determination to train as an agent. It must have seemed to her the one way in which she could give concrete shape to her hatred and thus find release from its corrosion.

Another factor may have been her deep distress at the manner in which France had behaved during the disasters of 1940; like many other admirers of the French, she could not bear to think that the beloved country had lost for ever its greatness. The end, she thought, was not yet. . . . Unlike most of us, Eliane Plewman was not content simply to carry hope; she was able, and willing, to do something herself to restore France to the glory of other days, and she accepted the challenge without flinching.

Without flinching, but knowing, still, the quick spear-thrusts of fear. Tom Plewman told me he knew her to be frightened; but this was something she dismissed as irrelevant.

In the few months of marriage that were as yet free from this shadow of impending separation, Tom Plewman was stationed on the East Coast and Eliane lived in a Kensington flat. It was, as the perspective given by the passage of time shows, a year that marked the end of the beginning; in July, when Eliane married, the Allies were retreating to El Alamein; when she left for France in August,

twelve months later, the enemy had been driven from North Africa, and Italy was ripe to fall. Victory, then, was certain; all that remained at issue was how long it would take in the winning.

Yet in her own, personal war 1942 brought a new cause for sadness; in November, the Germans had taken the whole of France, including Marseilles, which had, until then, been in the Unoccupied Zone.

I asked Tom Plewman if he had ever attempted to deflect his wife from her purpose; he replied, No. That was brave, I said, and he answered, quietly: 'No, not brave; it was because I did not dare. I knew that things could never go right between us again if I attempted to prevent her doing what she was convinced she must do.'

Conviction, then, must have been absolute. And yet, when the time came when she had to go, courage was strained almost to breaking-point. Her first attempt to drop into France was a failure; the plane encountered fearful weather, the hazards were extreme and when, at last, she returned to Tempsford, Eliane was almost broken in spirit. For a week she lay in a sanatorium, and then she tried again. . . .

She tried again; easily written words that take only a few seconds to tap out on a typewriter. She tried again; she had crouched, terrified, in the belly of a plane that had groped its way through black night to France, had waited, and waited, and waited, tensed for the moment when all courage must be gathered in the hands, to be spent, if need be, in one supreme moment—that when the reluctant body must be launched through space . . . had waited and the moment never came and the courage had to be drained back into the heart and stored there for future use. . . .

It is not easy to visualize valour of this calibre; nor the tearing anguish it must have occasioned in those who loved the wearer of it.

So she went back, and tried again; and that time Eliane Plewman dropped through a narrow aperture and floated down above the spreading hills of the Jura to land somewhere near Lons le Saunier; this was where Diana Rowden operated, and it may be she helped prepare the reception.

Tom Plewman knew virtually nothing about his wife's work in France; for news of that I had to wait until November, when I went to Madrid to see her brother. All Tom could tell me was that the time for waiting was then his; the last 'good news' letter he got was dated 30 June 1944; his wife had, in fact, been arrested months before. The



Diana Rowden
Croix de Guerre

1939

1943



IN HONOURED MEMORY OF THOSE MEMBERS OF THE
WOMEN'S TRANSPORT SERVICE (W.T.S.)
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR KING AND COUNTRY

M. WARDLSON M. DAMERMENT M. MORGAN M. J. L. GANLEY
S. M. BEEFMAN C. B. M. DICKIE D. MORGAN H. P. S. M. J. GANLEY
D. BLOCH B. E. F. HEDEN B. E. NELSON J. P. S. M. J. GANLEY
C. M. G. G. EAU M. HEATH JONES M. C. PEARE J. P. S. M. J. GANLEY
A. BURRILL J. HILDRICK SMITH F. S. M. J. GANLEY
M. S. RUTLER N. INYAT-KHANG C. B. E. RAMSAY J. P. S. M. J. GANLEY
M. BYCK C. LEFORT F. J. R. WILKINS B. WINEGRET H. J. GANLEY
C. CLEPP PATTON V. E. LEIGH L. R. OLF C. G. V. E. SZAFEC J. GANLEY
C. D. BROCKE C. M. LOPRESTI D. H. ROWDEN C. G. M. J. THOMPSON
K. CROSS D. M. MANNING Y. RUDELLAT P. C. WOOLLEN

W.T.S. (EAST AFRICA)

B. MAUSTIN B. DUNBAR THOMPSON B. KENTISH M. SYKES
A. GALLISHER W. GREY F. F. MOOREN RHENEFET
W. C. CAMERON S. HOOK R. SOUTHBY
THEIR NAME LIVETH FOR EVERMORE

Memorial tablet on the wall of St. Paul's Church, Knightsbridge

Allies by then had landed in France, and in August he was told that Elaine was missing; he fought through the Normandy campaign tortured by an anxiety that was to be unrelieved for nearly two years.

He got leave and went to London, and bearded the authorities; their polite vagueness, he said, goaded him almost beyond control. 'I wanted,' he told me, 'to hit them all over the head with a sandbag; I wanted to say, "Give me the truth, not soft soap. She is my wife, damn it."'

When the war ended, he was stationed in Germany; on his own initiative he made inquiries, but got nowhere. It was not until 10 July 1946 that a letter came telling him, at last, that the truth was known, and that Eliane had been murdered at Dachau nearly two years before.

That was the end of the story.

CHAPTER XII

TOM PLEWMAN LET me carry away with me the papers he had prepared, and I was touched to find that he had included amongst them a letter from Eliane, written from Madrid on 18 June 1941. In it she described in great detail a visit she had made to Andalusia, painting clearly with her words a picture of Seville and the hot, careless Spain of the south. With it she had enclosed a little watercolour she had bought from a painter whom she had seen working in a quiet side-street; looking at it now, on a cold, wet day in April, Seville seems infinitely desirable. How much more desirable it must surely have seemed to Tom Plewman when he opened an envelope from Madrid and saw it during the cheerless summer of 1941.

Amongst the documents I found, too, a roneoed letter, with the name Mrs. E. S. Plewman typed in at the top, which was, it seemed, a kind of valedictory letter from Colonel Buckmaster to those who had served under him and survived. It was a very agreeable letter, but it seemed to me a little odd that one should have been sent to Eliane Plewman, who had at the time it was written been missing for fifteen months, and who had, in fact, been dead for nine.

I would not wish to harp on endlessly on what may seem small matters of detail; but the carelessness that enabled a letter of this

nature to be sent to a woman known to be missing, and in all probability dead, is typical of the manner in which some at least of the next of kin were treated. Another example of this may be found in the letter informing Captain Plewman that his wife was dead, in which her name was throughout misspelt.

When I got back to London, after my visits to Lutterworth and Leicester, August was nearly half over; in the strange, still emptiness of London during that month, I wrote to Madame Browne-Bartoli, the mother of Eliane Plewman, and to Colonel Jacques Adam, who had taken over command of the *réseau* Jean Marie when its leader, Henri Frager, for whom Vera Leigh had worked, had been arrested. His address I had obtained from Ian Colvin, who had edited the English edition of *Colonel Henri's Story*. I was due to leave for France early in September, and I wished much to meet Colonel Adam.

His reply, although my letter had to be forwarded from his address in Paris to the Haute Savoie, where he was then on holiday, came in five days. I had told him of my plan to write this book, and he replied: 'I would like to tell you how very profoundly I agree with your decision to undertake such a task. The perpetuation of the memory of our dead is considered by the *Amicale* of the *réseau* Jean Marie as one of its most important functions today.

'You will, therefore, dear madam, understand that my desire is to give you every assistance that you may require.'

This, after the numerous rebuffs I had received from official quarters in England, was refreshing.

I also attempted, around this time, to find out what had happened to the R.A.F. station at Tempsford, from whose airstrip those who had flown to France in order to be dropped by parachute had taken off. By chance I had in July had a letter from a reader of the *Sunday Times* who wrote from an address close to Tempsford; when sending him some information for which he had asked, I, in turn, asked him if he could tell me to what use the airfield was then put. In reply, he told me that it was used by the National Institute of Agricultural Engineering as a testing ground for tractors and other mechanized aids to husbandry.

I was interested that Tempsford should have had associations with John Bunyan; Gamlingay, on the fringes of the airfield, was the scene of some of his preaching, and my readings on his life, taken in conjunction with a large-scale Ordnance Survey map of the region, suggested that he might often have ridden over the very earth

across which the planes carrying Yolande Beekman, Eliane Plewman, Madeleine Damerment and Andrée Borrell had roared before their wheels left the surface of the world and they were carried upwards into the skies.

Now, it seemed, the land was being used for useful, peaceful purposes, and I was pleased with this reminder that swords could be turned into ploughshares. I thought I would attempt, in the not too distant future, to visit Tempsford, and as a preliminary I wrote to the Secretary of the National Institute of Agricultural Engineering, explaining briefly what I had in mind, and asking if I might be allowed to have a look at his establishment at Tempsford.

The ensuing correspondence, spread over a month, strikes me as being a comical reflection on our present bureaucracy.

The Secretary sent me back a very civil letter, in which he told me that he merely rented some buildings and grazing land, and added that he thought he was right in saying that the department responsible for the agricultural use of Tempsford was the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food. He suggested that I should write to an official of this Ministry, whom he named, in Cambridge.

I wrote therefore, early in August, to this officer, and on 9 August received an acknowledgement on a postcard. A little later I got a reply from the London Ministry, saying it had no detailed information about the land in question, and suggested I should consult the Secretary of the National Institute of Agricultural Engineering. . . .

I then wrote rather tersely to say that he had recommended me to the Ministry; whereupon the very competent Principal Information Officer herself got in touch with me, and thereafter all was well.

In her letter, she told me that the old R.A.F. station at Tempsford had, indeed, been handed over to the Ministry of Agriculture for management, and that that management had been delegated to the Hunts County Agricultural Committee. The airfield had been constructed on land that had been waste for about fifty years before it had been taken over by the R.A.F. It had been under cultivation since the war, but there were continual drainage difficulties; she suggested that I might like to get in touch with the Hunts County Agricultural Officer, whose name and address she gave me.

I then wrote to this officer, and got a very pleasant answer, in which he told me that practically all the R.A.F. buildings remained on the site, as they were used for food-storage and as an egg-collecting depot. In addition he said the National Institute of Agricultural Engineering

made use of the fire tender station; the bomb-store was used for wintering cattle, and the Romney huts for grain and hay storage. . . .

He concluded by saying that, while the problem of poor drainage still remained, the airfield had done some good, as before it was built the land was waterlogged and covered with scrub.

It did some good. . . . I thought of the men and women who had flown from it to face their missions in France. Now cattle wintered in the bomb-store, eggs were collected in the hangars, and by and large it might be said that the landing strips had done some good, for crops now grew where once the land had been idle. Something had, after all, come of it. . . .

About this time, too, I had some short, sharp exchanges with the Information Department of the Air Ministry, which had failed even to acknowledge at least two letters. Stung into irony, I despatched a rather cross note, in which I said that whilst the Department might not, as a matter of policy, answer letters, it would be civil if a card could be sent to explain this; those who had sought information from it would then be aware of the situation, and would not repeat their communications.

As had been the case with the Ministry of Agriculture, I then got a swift reply from a very competent officer.

I had asked if I might be given a note of Diana Rowden's Record of Service, and had at the same time enclosed a chit from Mrs. Rowden, as next of kin, giving her permission that this information should be made available to me. At the time, I thought the very silly answers I first received were occasioned by nothing but silliness, but now, in view of the tenacious resistance put up by all official sources from which I sought assistance, I am not so sure it was not in fact very clever stone-walling.

I had, however, learned from Jean Overton Fuller that she had been given such a Record of Service in respect of Noor Inayat Khan, and, using this as a precedent, I succeeded in due course in prising the record of Diana from the Air Ministry.

In the event, it was hardly worth the trouble, and I did not bother to seek authority from the next of kin of Yolande Beekman, who had also been a W.A.A.F., to obtain her record. But it did at least give me some dates; I learnt that Diana had enrolled in the W.A.A.F. on 5 September 1941, and had been commissioned on 8 December of that year as Assistant Section Officer for Intelligence duties. She was promoted Section Officer in October 1942.

Her postings showed that she had been employed in the Department of the Chief of Air Staff from December 1941 until July 1942 when she had been posted to Moreton-in-the-Marsh; she had stayed there until 18 March 1943, on which date she was posted to A. Intelligence 10.

I assume that this was, in fact, the date when she was seconded to S.O.E., for she went to France in June 1943, and that gave her three months of training. The last entry read: 'Reported missing, subsequently death presumed.'

So August petered out; it is not a good month in which to make inquiries, for nearly everyone is on holiday, but it is a good month in which to work in London, for that very reason. The telephone does not ring, there are few engagements, and I was able to sit, and think, and write without interruption. My family was abroad.

Not being by nature excessively gregarious, it does not irk me to spend August in London; I relish the knowledge I am a solitary island in its vast seas, and am unlikely to be visited. I found solitude particularly desirable in 1955, for it enabled me to consider, patiently, the knowledge I had acquired during the last three months. As the year dipped down to September, I decided, with satisfaction, that I had done all that could at that time be done in England. The next phase must lie in France, and it was fortunate that I had already made arrangements to travel there on 9 September.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE SUMMER of 1945 I flew from London to Brussels, and as we left the English coast behind us and moved out over the narrow waters of the Channel I thought of all those tens of thousands of young men who had in the past six years looked down on the golden margin of Britain for the last time. I thought of all those who had flown over that narrow sea to find death waiting on an alien shore, and it was profoundly moving to be carried safely through those same skies and know the world once more at peace.

In the safe warmth of a commercial aircraft it was difficult even then, even on a day when the war had been ended only a few weeks, to remember danger. Already it seemed almost unbelievable that the air

we travelled had, so short a time before, been touched by death. We sat on upholstered seats, and drank coffee, and read the morning papers; a few weeks ago, and those who had made the same passage through the sky had done so in the trappings of war, had flown in peril of their lives. For us the soft cushion and the ham sandwich; for them the steel, the pilot and the navigator, the wireless operator and bomb-aimer, the gunner and the gun.

All this seemed incongruous and unreal. It was impossible to visualize danger in that brilliant summer sky.

I remembered that flight as I sat in the aircraft that carried a friend, her car, and me across the Channel in the summer of 1955. Ten years since the war ended; nine years since I had first seen France after her Liberation; a decade of peace between the France of the Resistance and the France I was about to visit. It struck me suddenly that for the first time I was coming to France to seek news of the war.

When I went back to France in 1946 I had fixed my mind on the future. I had not seen a French friend since the dark June of 1940; but letters exchanged after the Liberation had filled in the gap. For me there were no personal dilemmas. My friends had behaved as I had, in my heart, known they would; there was no shame to come between us; I could greet each one as a patriot, with love and gratitude.

I felt then, as I feel now, that those of us who never lived in German-occupied territory were not entitled to stand in judgment over those who did. We did not know how we would have emerged from such an ordeal; we could not say that we would have had the courage to resist. We could admire those who had shown themselves as made of valiant fibre, but we could not condemn those who had been weak, for we might ourselves have been found wanting.

I could not be sanguine that I would myself have proved a heroine; the most I could have hoped for myself would have been a chill neutrality. Unless anger had quickened in me the seed of courage; I liked to think that that was possible. I remembered the story told by Anne Marie Walters, who had been parachuted into France early in 1944, into Gascony, to work for S.O.E. She had described how the Germans had savagely beaten two small children, aged two and four, in the presence of their parents, captured members of the Resistance, to induce them to talk. In this ignoble endeavour they had failed; and here I found an endurance and a stoicism that defied belief.

I tried to conceive my emotions had my small daughter been tortured before my eyes, and I knew I could not have kept silent. Had

her life been asked as forfeit, the sacrifice might have been less difficult; death would have been quick and would put an end for ever to pain. But to watch her suffering, knowing I had power to ease it—that would demand strength and fortitude that would be beyond me.

And yet, and yet . . . perhaps there is a rage that consumes all other emotion. A people that could inflict cruel pain on little children, in order that their parents might be driven to betray their comrades, their country and their cause—could the presence of such monstrous evil harden the heart to all other consideration so that it lived and beat and pulsed only that the evil should be destroyed?

That is a question I can never resolve; but it seems to me conceivable that when man is faced with the naked manifestation of wickedness, he may find himself stripped naked too, hardened into one thought, one aim, one passion, that Hell shall not find itself triumphant.

I thought of these things as the waters of the Channel rippled golden beneath our wings. It seemed to have some bearing on my quest; for the women whose story I sought to trace had gone of their own free will to place their bodies in peril of agony and death. For them there had been choice; and each one, I thought, must have had a clear awareness of evil when the decision was made. I felt—and I believe I was right in this—that they must have been moved by reason to decide as they did; the primitive, warring instinct, so strong in many men, is denied to women, and for a woman to join a secret conflict was an action dictated by the brain and not the blood.

As the French coast wheeled swiftly beneath us, my own heart moved faster. Always there is emotion in coming to France; and this time I was coming not, as in the past, as a friend, but as a surgeon. I had resolved to dissect, if I could, a wound perhaps imperfectly healed; I had come to probe into matters that many would consider best left alone.

We landed, and it was a glorious day. We drove across the gently rolling French country, through Lumbres, into the low sweeping hills of that pastoral landscape, up to the little manor of Bayenghem. When last I saw it, the garden had been cold with winter; now all was heavy with summer and a sense of harvest. When I had greeted the Delabres, and gone up to my room to wash, I stood for a long time at the window; all was beautiful and still and wrapped in quiet and I suddenly hated the impulse that had sent me to probe an evil past.

France I had loved since first I knew her; now restored from bondage, with the toil and sweat of ten years built into a cicatrice to hide her wounds, why should I seek to uncover the cruel years? I planned to

invade the homes of total strangers, and ask them to dig deep into memory, to put in words history that time might mercifully have obscured. Was this, perhaps, an impertinence I could not encompass?

Would these people even remember the names I would bring them—Paulette, Mariette, Denise? Would their faces show blank when I mentioned them, would they dismiss me curtly, as a vulgar interloper? I resolved then and there that if rebuffed once I would try no more. My skin, I knew, was vulnerable.

The church clock struck eight; with its chime, my mood of blackness withdrew. Of a sudden came certainty that it would not be like that: it was in my bones that the friends of Paulette and Mariette and Denise in 1943, in 1944, would be good friends. Suddenly I was sure I need not fear them.

I went downstairs to dinner.

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEXT MORNING was fine and clear; soon after breakfast, which we ate sitting on the terrace, warmed by a fleeting sun, we set out for St. Quentin.

St. Quentin was the home of one of my few contacts; I had the address there of a Mademoiselle Gobeaux who had sought an interview with the Allied authorities in Paris shortly after the Liberation, in connection with Yolande Beckman. The address I had was, therefore, more than ten years old. I was not hopeful that it might still prove fruitful, but as St. Quentin lay on the road to Paris, it was certainly worth calling there.

Our route lay right across the battlefields of the Western Front, that we had the day before only skirted.

I was much moved to travel this country, associated always for me with my youth, with Graves and Blunden, Sassoon and Grenfell, Sorley, Aldington and Edward Thomas, whose books and poetry had touched me so often to tears as I read them, a schoolgirl in a green serge tunic. I remembered a passage in Richard Aldington's novel *All Men are Enemies*, in which his hero, a survivor of the Western Front, was horrified to learn that a boy, too young to have fought himself, envied him his experience.

The boy had, I recalled, cried angrily, 'Even death did not want us. . . .' I thought how different our war had been; how different the emotions of those who were young today compared with those I felt some twenty years ago. The 1914 war, for us, was something that lay heavy on our lives; the long-drawn conflict of 1939-45, infinitely more widespread in its destruction and its miseries, had left no ripple in the consciousness of those too young to have experienced it as adults.

No one had written *A Farewell to Arms* for my generation; many had written books of adventure that might stir a young man to envy.

In spite of the sun, I felt a shadow on the world; the trees were thick with apples and horses toiled up narrow lanes and men and women bent over the fields in harvest; for them this was accustomed ritual but for me there was an element that chilled. Could one ever stand on earth that had been soaked in blood and feel it trickle through the fingers and think of it as nourishment for crops?

This was an emotion I felt many times in France in 1955; in the attic where Yolande Beekman had sent out radio messages all one long, cold winter at peril of her life; in the kitchen of the sawmill where the Germans had arrested Diana; in the Café Mas in Paris, where Vera Leigh was taken by the Gestapo. . . . It seemed to me terrible that the attic now held brushes and paints, that the kitchen was warm with the scent of baking bread, that fat and wealthy bourgeois stuffed themselves in the Café Mas with rich and succulent food. This, I well know, is stupid; but there is a terrible incongruity when the tapestry of noble tragedy and triumph is used as a backcloth for mundane habits.

So we came to St. Quentin, which, for the greater part of the first war, lay behind the German front; perhaps, I now conjecture, the will to resist German tyranny was thus early given sustenance in Mademoiselle Gobeaux.

When we had found a hotel and washed and unpacked necessities for the night, we went out to find 117 rue de la Fère, where, eleven years ago, had lived this Mademoiselle Gobeaux.

I had, after unpacking, also refreshed my memory of this redoubtable lady by re-reading my notes about her; I sensed from them that she was of formidable fibre, and I hoped ardently that I might find her still where she had dwelt a decade earlier.

Mademoiselle Gobeaux had known Yolande Beekman as Mariette, or Yvonne de Chauvigny; to quote her own words, in simple translation: 'She was presented to me as the cousin of a friend; in October on the 11th (1943) having need of a roof under which to make radio

transmissions, this friend asked me if I would receive an English woman and her radio set. For three months she came to my house to make her transmissions. She left eventually to use the house of a friend, and was arrested on 14 January 1944, by the Gestapo. I was able to trace her whereabouts until her departure for Paris, after that, nothing. . . .'

I knew, too, that Mademoiselle Gobeaux had worked in a pharmacy in St. Quentin, owned by a M. Corteel; that a M. Camille Boury also worked there. That when Yolande Beekman first arrived in the town, she had lived with a Mademoiselle Lefevre, of the Avenue de la République, near the Café Moulin Brûlé. That Mademoiselle Lefevre had, however, been unable to harbour her for long, and in October she had moved to the house of M. Boury; at this time, she started transmitting from the attic of Mademoiselle Gobeaux.

She worked there until the end of December; the attic was on the second floor, and it was unlikely that the sound of the transmissions could have been heard outside; nevertheless D/F¹ cars were seen in the neighbourhood, and one day between Christmas and New Year a D/F car passed the house. It was decided, therefore, that Yolande should move, and she then transmitted from M. Boury's house, usually three times a week.

On 12 January, a man was seen in the street outside this house with what looked like earphones on his head and his collar turned up; on the 13th Yolande, Guy Bieler and another agent were arrested and taken to the prison at St. Quentin.

Here, Mademoiselle Gobeaux had tried to take her food, but she was told this was impossible, as she was in 'underground cells'; probably this meant that she was to be held incommunicado. A plan to effect her escape was drawn up, but she was moved before it could be put into operation. It is possible that this plan was betrayed to the Germans.

On 14 January, the police came to arrest M. Boury, but he was away in Paris and his wife was able to get a message to him to stay away. He did not return home until after the Liberation.

On or about 15 January, more than a dozen people were arrested in the Group, mostly local Resistance members who had acted as letter boxes, and in similar capacities.

This was the story of Yolande Beekman as it affected Mademoiselle Gobeaux; as a precaution against drawing a blank at 117 rue de la Fère, I looked up Lefevre, Boury and Corteel in the local telephone directory;

¹ Direction-finding cars, used to pinpoint the whereabouts of illegal W/T transmissions.

the first two were not in it, but the Pharmacy Corteel was. This gave me the hope that I would find Mademoiselle Gobeaux. So we drove off, through the first shadow of dusk on a lovely September evening.

The rue de la Fère, my map showed me, lay across the river, on the southern outskirts of St. Quentin. We found it easily enough, but could see no house numbered 117; we drove right out of the town, passing the massive structure of the local brewery, before admitting defeat. We turned and drove back to the river; turned again, to retrace our route; half way back, I noticed a postman, straddled across a bicycle, talking to a man at a ground floor window.

I jumped out of the car, and ran across the road. The postman, I saw, was in fact in the process of buying maggots from the fat man at the window; as a keen fisherman myself, I warmed to him.

At the same time, I knew myself to be nervous; this, then, was the first step towards my goal; by this would I stand or fall. I asked, very correctly, very politely, if either of the gentlemen could tell me where I would find 117 rue de la Fère, for I wished to visit a Mademoiselle Gobeaux, who had, I believed, lived there some years ago.

To my astonished delight, the fat and rather unattractive seller of maggots said, at once: 'She of the Resistance; oh yes, we know of her. But she does not live in the rue de la Fère.'

'Do you then perhaps know where she does live?'

The postman and the seller of maggots consulted briefly and unintelligibly and then the postman said: 'If you will follow me, I will lead you to the Pharmacy Corteel. There you will find her.'

I cannot describe how I felt at that moment; how does one feel when one has put a large plaque on zero, and zero turns up? But in that moment, all my thoughts and ideas about my quest were radically changed. I think that, for the first time, it became real. Names, laboriously acquired, notes slowly accumulated, dates gradually put together—they had until then been the bones on which I had worked. Letters had been my grist, and books and the printed word, files and second-hand histories and papers yellowed, creased and thick with dust; now the bones were to find their flesh, and the inanimate past was to quicken into life. Mademoiselle Gobeaux, St. Quentin, and an attic in the rue de la Fère; these had been words and now, miraculously, a flesh-and-blood postman was to lead me to flesh-and-blood reality. I had moved from a world where France and the Resistance and Special Operations were words on paper, into a world where they had lived and drawn breath.

I remembered, as I slipped back into the car, some lines written by John Pudney:

*. . . Some go to war with words on paper.
And lucky ones, of simple stature,
Kill not to kill, but serve the future. . . .*

We followed the postman, back across the river again, and up a sloping, cobbled street; for a moment he paused, pointed to a shop on the left-hand side of the road, waved and pedalled on. As we drew up at the place where he had stopped, I saw we were opposite the Pharmacy Corteel.

I was very nervous and knew that I must go in quickly before my courage failed. I crossed the road and walked into the shop; a long mahogany counter, rising to shoulder level, faced me and behind it were rows of ancient drug jars.

A man in a white coat came to serve me and I said: 'I am seeking a Mademoiselle Gobeaux who, at one time, I believe worked here.'

Rather to my consternation, he turned without a word, and disappeared behind the counter. Had he not understood, or had he never heard of Mademoiselle Gobeaux and found himself too fatigued, late on a Saturday evening, even to acquaint me of this circumstance?

As I stood irresolute, wondering what my next move best might be, a sturdy, black-haired, ruddy-faced woman peered at me over that monstrous counter. Screwing up my courage, I started again: I am looking for a Mademoiselle Gobeaux . . .

'This is she,' said the man assistant, bobbing up once more beneath a great earthenware jar. Wasting no more time, I said, simply: 'I had a friend who knew Mariette . . .'

I got no further. There was a flurry and a swirl and gust of wind; the next moment, Mademoiselle Gobeaux had put her arms round me, and had kissed me on both cheeks.

'Ah,' she cried, 'you knew a friend of Mariette's. Wait here a moment.'

In a few seconds she was back, tugging on her great coat, searching for keys in her pocket, seizing me by the hand. 'Come,' she said, 'we will go home, it is just across the road, quickly, quickly; and you will have supper with me, and we will talk, yes, all the evening. Ah, you knew a friend of Mariette. . . .'

She led me across the road; I managed to explain that I had a companion waiting in a car. 'She too,' said Mademoiselle Gobeaux, 'come in, come in. . . .'

So I collected M from her car, and together we went into the house of Mademoiselle Gobeaux, and stood under the roof where Yolande Beekman had tapped three times a week, for three months, at her key. I knew then, firmly and for ever, that it was all right; I might, in my search, meet rogues, crooks, time servers, lackeys, lick spittles and traitors; but I knew, with sure conviction, that I need fear nothing from those who had been truly of the Resistance and who had served side by side with British officers sent to further the cause of France; they would not resent my purpose or deny their history.

In this, I was proved right.

We walked into the sitting-room, and there, on the chimneypiece, was a photograph of a girl in W.A.A.F. uniform. Mademoiselle Gobeaux went straight to it, picked it up, and put it in my hands. 'There,' she said, 'that is she. Mariette—Yolande . . . *toujours riant*.' And she added, as she was to add so many times that night: '*Pauvre fille*.'

We sat down; normally I am not at a loss to find words, but for a moment I felt myself wholly inadequate and unable to say what was in my mind. For four months I had been playing with words, and now I was in the presence of action; I had not, in those four months, been able to gain contact with a single soul who had known Yolande Beekman as relative or friend; now, on my first day in France, some casual notes carelessly stowed away had led me to a woman who had shared, in some measure, her dangers and her duty, who had given her a roof under which to work, who had taken her food in prison and had loved her as a sister.

This then was for me the beginning; I was, that September in France, to find myself many times near to tears, and they were very near as Mademoiselle Gobeaux spoke of Yolande Beekman. Before I had been with her ten minutes, I knew that so long as Mademoiselle Gobeaux lived, Mariette would not be forgotten.

Her memory was in itself touching in its clarity; she knew the exact date when first she had met Yolande, when first she had transmitted from her house, the date when she had been arrested, and could even identify the different days in the week. Suddenly she pointed to a calendar: it was Saturday, 10 September, and she said: 'Tonight I must write a letter to Yolande's mother and sisters, for 13 September is the eleventh anniversary of her death, and I do not want them to think that I could ever forget that day, for should I live to be one hundred that would be impossible.'

She got up and fetched a bottle of wine and we drank. That reduced

the tension and we talked. I told her what I had in mind and why I wanted to learn the story of Yolande, and she expressed strong approval. But, she said, she could tell me little of Yolande's work, for she had done nothing more than offer her a place for her transmitter; Mademoiselle Gobeaux was a Red Cross nurse, and it was therefore impossible that she herself should engage in clandestine work.

How, then, had she come to know Yolande? I asked. It was simple, it happened through a friend. It all started with Mademoiselle Lefevre, a school mistress, a resistant of the very first hour; it was to Mademoiselle Lefevre that Yolande Beekman went when she came to St. Quentin. And Mademoiselle Lefevre had a common friend with Mademoiselle Gobeaux in a Madame Ponthieu, who was also of the Resistance; it was Madame Ponthieu who had asked Mademoiselle Gobeaux if she would harbour a radio operator.

Describing this incident, that might for her have carried sentence of death, Mademoiselle Gobeaux said, briefly: 'She knew my views. And I knew my duty.'

Those words took care of Mademoiselle Gobeaux's reaction to the proposal.

I suggested, then, that while she knew nothing of Yolande's other work, she might know something of her arrest and what happened subsequently. She became then very animated and very fierce, speaking with great intensity. She knew, or suspected, more than she cared to know; she told me at considerable length the circumstances that had led to catastrophe and told me plainly whom she thought responsible. As the people she accused are still living and there is now no means of confirming or denying her suspicions, I cannot put them down in print. Let it be said simply that Mademoiselle Gobeaux believes Yolande Beekman and Guy Bieler were betrayed. In this, of course, she is right.

There was, however, no question, Mademoiselle Gobeaux assured me, that both Guy Bieler and Yolande Beekman had been arrested in the Café Moulin Brûlé, together.

I questioned her about this, for Maurice Buckmaster, in *Specially Employed*, had described in some detail how the arrests had, according to his information, been made. He said: 'After many weeks of patient search, the radio-detection vans located Yolande working her wireless set in a farmhouse near the town. Two Feldgendarmes rushed in upon her before she could draw her revolver and took her into custody. Although the alarm had been given by the farmer, it did not

reach Guy for some hours and by that time the hunt was up. Yolande refused to speak. Even when she was beaten into an unconscious state she resolutely closed her lips and forced herself to oblivion of Guy's whereabouts. When they gloatingly told her that he was captured she expressed no emotion. They did not know whether she believed them or not. It was, as a matter of fact, true. They captured Guy as the result of a denunciation, and because he tried to escape they tortured him. . . .

This Mademoiselle Gobeaux denied; she repeated, they were taken at the Café Moulin Brûlé, together; Madame Thixier, who owned it then, is still there, come let us go and see her.

So out we went, crammed ourselves somehow into the car—a coupé, from which the back seat had been removed to make place for our luggage—and with M at the wheel, we set out for the Moulin Brûlé.

By now night had almost fallen; we skirted the eastern outskirts of the town, crossed a park and drove along a road flanked by solid houses set in fine gardens. We came to a corner where a particularly large house stood at the junction of two roads.

'There,' said Mademoiselle Gobeaux; 'that was Gestapo H.Q.; it was there Yolande was taken, and ill treated. . . . Now it belongs to a rich manufacturer.'

I said, 'I would not want to live in such a house myself,' and Odette Gobeaux answered: 'Nor I. I would fear to hear in the night the cries of those who had suffered within its walls.'

It was as though a ghost had walked over my grave; ten years after it had ended, German Occupation of France was becoming real to me. When I first went back in the years immediately following the war, the recent befoulment by the Germans of a country I loved was something I tried to forget. I walked the streets of Paris, and knew that the Germans had walked them as tyrants, but I had not probed into their crannies.

Now these crannies were being revealed to me; the tall, brick and stone house, so typical of northern French architecture, acquired significance. A boy whistled on the pavement outside, a woman walked by pushing a pram, a tree caught by the evening wind fluttered gently with it; and the house, shuttered and silent, was no longer a house in a street in a town, but a place where the Gestapo had worked and tortured, where Yolande Beckman who had, in imagination, become very real to me, had been dragged across the threshold.

We drove on, down a long avenue shaded on each side by tall trees. On the very outskirts of the town, almost in open country, we came to the Café Moulin Brulé.

It was a long, low, brick building, not, one must admit, very attractive in appearance; it had a front of glass windows and the woodwork was painted a vivid yellow; across the glass was an advertisement for the local beer, and in front were some privets in wooden boxes.

A thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand such cafés may be found in France; it is difficult to drive five miles without seeing such a one, and the Moulin Brulé could not have been more unexceptionable. Once again, reality came as a shock to me; there had, in the mind, been an image of the clandestine meeting place, the *bistro* where men whispered across marble-topped tables, the café where messages were exchanged, quietly, surreptitiously, but not *this*. . . . Not this ugly, grey brick building, standing on a quiet road, just before it forked to the right over a wide canal; could this dull little building really have been a stage for courage and fear and violent tragedy?

We went in—and there was the prototype of a legion of cafés, a long, bare room, wooden floor, marble-topped tables, a zinc-covered bar, rows and rows of bottles, and two postmen and a policeman drinking beer.

Odette Gobeaux called for Madame Thixier, who came out from her kitchen; she was plump, pretty, dressed in a blue and white checked overall. Introductions were made, we sat down and drinks were brought.

'It was here, was it not,' asked Mademoiselle Gobeaux, 'that Yolande and the Commandant Guy were arrested?'

'Oh yes,' said Madame Thixier. 'The Gestapo came in through that door while we were sitting here at this table talking.'

At that moment the door opened and a workman came in; he called a greeting and sat down with the postmen to discuss a new type of motor-bicycle recently put on the market.

'What happened then?'

'We were all taken away; I never saw them again.'

Madame Thixier was taken to Ravensbruck; her husband died in Buchenwald; today she runs the café alone. I asked her, what do people think in France today of the Resistance? and she answered, at once, 'that we were imbeciles. *Ils n'avaient qu'à rester chez eux. . .*' Freely translated, we stuck our necks out. . . .





Madeline Damerment
Croix de Guerre



Vera Leigh

She said: 'All the honours went to the resisters of the last hour, who were still alive and free at the Liberation. Most of us, who had resisted at once when it was most dangerous, were dead or in concentration camps. When we, the survivors, came home in 1945 it was all over. No one was interested in us.'

She said this quite simply, entirely without rancour, as one stating a matter of undisputed fact.

She added: 'Now, I belong to no *Amicale*, sit on no committees. During the war we worked in clandestinity, my husband, our friends, and I prefer to be clandestine now. What we did is something we know ourselves.'

What we did is something we know ourselves; so often, I was to hear those words in one form or another. . . . 'For me, there could have been no other choice; now I am at peace.' 'My heart is tranquil. . . .' 'It is enough for me to know that I need not reproach myself.' 'I can live on good terms with myself and that is all that matters.'

Later, I was to recall Madame Thixier's remarks when a friend in Paris, referring to her husband who had joined the Resistance in its earliest days and had suffered atrociously in Buchenwald, said: 'He does not belong to any *Amicale* or club; he finds it disgusting that men should sit down to eat at the same table each month, because once they were immured together like animals in a cess pool.'

On Madame Thixier's experiences in Ravensbruck I could not question her; nor would it have served any purpose. She talked, instead, about Yolande, and she showed me the room where she had lodged and from which she had, it seemed, sometimes transmitted; then she said: 'The man you should see is M. Cordelette of Fonsommes; he was the leader of our *réseau*, and he knew far more than I did about Mariette's work.'

I asked where Fonsommes was, and was told only a few kilometres away. Next day was Sunday—might I perhaps call on M. Cordelette in the morning? Yes, surely, provided I did it before noon; he always left home at noon on Sunday to visit his old father who lived in St. Quentin.

As we were leaving Madame Thixier said: 'Yolande was living here when she was arrested; she had moved from Boury's house when she gave up transmitting from Odette's attic; it was in that room that she spent her last free night. . . .'

We were then outside on the pavement, and she pointed to a window at the end of the café; how odd, I thought, to live surrounded

by such memories. To serve beer and Dubonnet in a bar where once the Gestapo had arrested husband and friends; to look up at a window and know that a girl, now dead, had occupied it years ago, and had sat there sending messages to a country still free and unconquered.

We took leave and drove back to St. Quentin. Odette Gobeaux insisted that we sup with her. We collected the wherewithal and stopped, too, at the pharmacy across the road to talk with M. Corteel, who lived above his shop.

He was a large man, of pale complexion and pale hair; it was difficult to imagine him moved by passion, but he said: 'A few days after she had been arrested, the Gestapo brought Mariette to my shop; it was clear she had been very ill treated. She asked me where various large sums of money, belonging to the *réseau*, were hidden; I said I did not know anything about such things and persuaded the Germans that this was true.' He added: 'I think that if I had had a revolver I would have shot those Germans, no matter what the consequences. . . .' And then he said: '*Cette pauvre fille.*'

We went back to the house of Mademoiselle Gobeaux; as she prepared our supper, I found her a woman of many parts. Foremost, she is a nurse; but she is an amateur painter also of talent and in her sitting-room was a crayon portrait of General le Clerc—her own work—on an easel draped with a *tricolore*. On the walls were many of her canvases and, when I admired the charming ceiling, painted with a device of roses and chestnuts, she said that too was her creation. . . .

She spoke much of her mother, who had not known Yolande's real reason for visiting the house; she had thought she came in connection with her daughter's nursing activities.

Madame Gobeaux was recently dead, but her *chaise longue* still stood in the sitting-room, and across it a soft, Shetland rug. . . . Odette picked it up and said, 'This was a present to Maman from Yolande's sisters; they have been here and visited us. I shall leave it here always.' And she said, 'Yolande was full of little kindnesses to Maman.'

We sat down to eat and by now Odette was warmed to her memories and they came flowing in a rich tide: 'Look, that piece of wire, hanging down beside the window, painted green. . . .' I looked. 'It is part of her aerial, it came down from the attic, and ended in here. When the room was being repainted, I thought to take it down and then I said to myself, no, why should you do that, let it be. It was hers. She left a dial, part of her transmitter, here too; that I gave to her mother, for she had touched it with her hands. . . .

'I tried to take her food in prison, but it was not allowed. Was that dangerous for me? Poof! I was a nurse. Even the Boches had some respect, sometimes, for the Red Cross. But she was in cells the Red Cross were not allowed to visit.

'We planned to rescue her; it needed much money. Had we had it, we might have succeeded. Funny things were happening with money, there were those who would do anything for it. *Enfin*, we could not raise enough in the short time we had. One could buy most things in France during the Occupation; honour perhaps cheapest of all, far cheaper than good meat or butter. We could have bribed Yolande to safety, could we have touched a large enough sum. . . .

'There were those who should have had money, but said they had burned it, as dangerous, after the arrests, with incriminating papers. Poof, what nonsense. Papers, yes, one would burn those, but not money, money cannot speak.

'Now, those who won the money are the heroes; the rest of us, we are *petites gens*. No one cares any more, what happened in the war. You know, Mademoiselle Lefevre, she who was one of the very earliest of the Resistance here, the schoolmistress, to whom Yolande first went when she arrived in France, she was indeed a heroine and a great lady; she died in Buchenwald. Not long ago a plaque was unveiled in her memory, and how many of her old pupils do you think came to the ceremony—three. . . .'

So, to this accompaniment, we ate. Everything Mademoiselle Gobeaux did she did impetuously, briskly, swiftly; the plates were swept up and almost tossed out of the room.

'Now,' she said, 'I will show you the attic where Yolande transmitted. You know, she came three times a week, at the same hour,¹ to transmit. She had a key to the front door. On Christmas Day, 1943, she came here as usual, for it was her scheduled day for a transmission. I had the family here for luncheon, we were all in this room. I heard Yolande come in, quietly, quietly, and move through the hall and up the stairs. I was waiting for her; no one else heard; later, as I listened, I caught the sound of her footsteps in the passage, as she let herself out. While we were sitting at our Christmas luncheon, Yolande had sent a message to London. . . .

'We will go upstairs, I will show you the attic.'

I followed her up the stairs to the first floor and beyond it, up a

¹ Mademoiselle Gobeaux insists this was so. It would seem imprudent. Regular transmissions greatly facilitated the task of German D/F operations.

narrow flight to the attic rooms. On one side was a studio with easels, canvases, brushes and paints; on the other a room empty save for a few crates, a few odds and ends scattered about the floor.

'This was it; it was here that Yolande made her transmissions to London. She threw her aerial through this window.'

She opened a little mansard window, and the night came clear to greet us, thick with stars. I looked around the attic, the bare wooden floor and the gaunt wooden rafters, chill, even in the summer; I tried to imagine what it must have been like in winter, that freezing winter of 1943, when Yolande Beekman had sat there, week after week, month after month, tapping steadily, relentlessly, bridging the gulf between an Occupied France and an Unoccupied Britain. At that time I had been in Jerusalem, enjoying myself enormously; it was, I thought, salutary that I should stand in this attic and know humility.

'*La pauvre fille,*' said Mademoiselle Gobeaux; she led me out of the empty attic into her studio. In it was a wide divan covered with brown velvet.

'It was here Yolande waited until the hour came for her transmission to London. She would lie, face down on the sofa, her face cradled in her hands, reading, waiting. . . .'

'Was she,' I asked, with fear catching at me even twelve years later, in that cold and ill-lit attic, 'was she, do you think, frightened?'

'*Ça, non, jamais de la vie.*' She said it strongly, emphatically. 'Sometimes we would talk, and I am certain she was without fear. "If they get me, I will never speak," she said. Nor did she. She was of a formidable courage. She would laugh, always, and say, "after the war, I will come back in my uniform as an officer, and we will celebrate the Liberation together".' And she added, once more, '*pauvre fille.*'

This, too, was to be a recurrent pattern. In St. Amour, Madame Clerc told me, of Diana Rowden, that she had said, 'After the war, I will come back in a big American car and I will wear my uniform and we will drive up these hills in a few minutes that now we take hours to climb on foot.'

And Madame Juif told me that Diana would talk sometimes of the Gestapo and the tortures they inflicted on their prisoners, but she was without fear for herself.

Madame Guépin, speaking of Andrée Borrell: said, 'She was without fear; I do not think she even thought of herself.' And her sister said: 'She was wholly lacking in nerves; she was *un garçon manqué.*'

This, then, was part of the pattern.

But in Madrid I learnt that fear, too, was part of the texture of this world of clandestinity. Speaking of Eliane Plewman, one of her closest, life-long friends, who had known her in Marseilles in 1943, said: 'I know she was frightened then, but she would not make her escape. She knew that she was doomed. I left her on the stairs, and said, "*Au revoir*", and she answered, "not *au revoir*—*adieu*".'

Odette Gobeaux closed the window through which Yolande Beekman had once thrown her aerial, and we went downstairs. Another photograph of her stood on a dressing table in a bedroom; again, Odette said: 'She was always laughing, always smiling; she would cycle away to the Moulin Brulé, so cheerfully she might have been a young girl without a care in the world, pedalling off to meet her lover.'

It was miraculous to me that this should have been so, when the companion that accompanied Yolande Beekman must surely have been the shadow of death.

I think that is all I learned that evening; as soon as I got back to the hotel I sat down and made my notes. But I had in those few hours learnt everything I wanted. The details of Yolande Beekman's service would, I knew even then, remain unrevealed to me; too many years had passed, the story was too old, the scent too faint for me ever to follow it to the end. But I knew all I needed to know; that her suffering and her death had not been without meaning. She had left, clear as a candle flickering in that dark attic, a flame that would never be forgotten until the last of those who had known her in France were dead. In that is more of immortality than most of us can hope for.

CHAPTER XV

NEXT MORNING, WE drove out again to the Moulin Brulé; we asked the way to Fonsommes, and drove on, along a narrow, winding lane to that tiny hamlet. It has but one street and that is now called rue Commandant Bieler; appropriately, it was in this street that M. Cordelette lived.

His house stood behind a tall double gate, let into a high wall; it lay along the side of a courtyard, where chickens brooded beneath a warm sun and an angry dog yapped at our heels.

I pulled a bell and a small, dark woman came to the door, wrapped in a dressing gown; it was then about 11 a.m. and I felt immediately drawn to a woman who, like me, could be found thus attired at that hour. I explained again, and briefly, my purpose. Her gaze, which had at first been fierce, softened. She let me into the house and said: 'I will call my husband.' A few minutes later he came into the room.

I was at first entirely unable to concentrate on anything but a terrible nervous tic that convulsed his eyes; in my anxiety that I should appear not to notice it, I could look at nothing else. When, after a few minutes, I was able to bring this foolish impulse under control, I saw M. Cordelette to be a man of extraordinary sensibility; he was, I was certain, physically broken, but his character was solid rock and this dominated his corporal frailty.

He had a wonderful face; gentle, calm, reflective, showing wit and courage and humanity. His sparse hair was almost white and his hands trembled, slightly, slowly, deliberately and remorselessly. He led me into his office and asked me to sit down. He said: 'You want to know about Mariette. . . .'

I said yes, that was my purpose. His office was stuffed full of papers and the equipment of a draughtsman; that was indeed his profession, and a half-drawn scale map lay on a board. How he controlled his trembling hands to encompass such precision must in itself be a minor miracle.

He lit a Gauloise Bleue, rejecting my offer of a milder cigarette, and he said, 'Mariette and le Commandant Guy. . . . They were both of the finest stuff imaginable. There are not many like them.'

That, I said, was the impression I too had formed.

'Mariette. . . .' He said her name with strange deliberation: 'She was a wonderful woman; and Guy, there are few men one could compare with him.'

Then he said, briskly, 'Well, what can I tell you?'

I said, 'Anything, and everything, you will.'

He thought for a moment.

'It was George Darling, an Englishman, who first put me in touch with London. George had been left behind, when the English retreated in the campaign of 1940. He had been of the Resistance from the start; somehow, I do not know how, he gained contact with le Commandant Suttill—Prosper. You have heard of Prosper?'

I said I had; I asked, 'Did you know him yourself, and Denise?'

'Denise, of course; and Prosper. Denise was often here. Through them George had a link with London. I too was then brought into

the *réseau*; I was head of the *sous-réseau* Tell. We continued after the arrests of June 1943. But in the end, with Mariette and Bieler, I was taken. . . .

He then told me that he had been imprisoned for eight months in the Gestapo H.Q. of St. Quentin and had been monstrously tortured. So monstrously that, at the end of that time, despairing of gaining information from him, the Germans had released him; he was too broken even to be despatched to Germany. They thought he must surely die within a few weeks.

This he mentioned casually, in passing. He said: 'In Paris, you must see Madame Guépin; she was the companion of George Darling who was killed in 1943 and she is the *liquidateur* of the *réseau* Prosper. She will be able to tell you much. She knew Mariette and Denise and many others. I can give you her address.'

That, I said, would be very valuable to me.

'For myself, I forget very much; all the time you understand, we were busy, busy, busy; now the details have gone. But we did some serious sabotage. We did not merely talk.'

Then he said: 'The Germans, you know, they were not all supermen. They were often very stupid. For example, I will tell you that when they came for me, I had many dangerous documents hidden in this office; I had them scattered through my files, my drawings, my maps. They searched superficially, and did not find one. But they took all my savings, 100,000 francs; that was an important sum in those days, now I would need 3,000,000 to replace it. I got nothing back—the Government said that this was not war damage, and would make no refund.'

This too he said simply, without rancour, as one stating unemotional fact.

He looked at me and said, 'But at the end of it, I am well off. *J'ai le cœur tranquille.*'

He rose to his feet, and I noticed that the tic in his eye had strengthened. I thought I must not question him further, for perhaps his effort at control was greater than it appeared, that his courtesy outweighed his sense of self-preservation.

'Come with me, I will show you a souvenir of Mariette, but you may not touch it.'

This I found disconcerting; there was a slight element of the macabre in the suggestion that he had a souvenir so sacred that alien hands might not hold it.

We went into the kitchen and he pointed to the ceiling; it bore some faint, red-brown stains.

'There,' he said, 'Mariette made those; she opened one day a bottle of beetroot wine and it exploded over the ceiling. Sometimes we have thought to have it repainted, but then we have said No. Mariette made those marks, we will keep them in memory of her.' I remembered Mademoiselle Gobeaux, and the aerial she had kept these many years. Then his wife, now dressed, said: 'There is another souvenir in the garden.'

We went out to the courtyard, flanked with untidy growing geraniums, and piles of manure, and a careless, casual muddle of flowering grass and weeds. There was a chicken run, and in it sat an ancient hen, so heavily burdened with years she was unable to move, and crouched, ponderous, immobile, somnolent in the midday heat.

'That hen was hatched when le Commandant Guy was with us. He held it in his hands, and now we cannot kill it. It is a link with him, and precious to us.'

I cannot conceive what the R.S.P.C.A. would say if one of its officers saw that hen, but perhaps he would understand and turn a blind eye.

We went back into the house, to drink a glass of wine. Madame Cordelette showed me a photograph of Mariette, and another of Guy Bieler. It was the first time I had seen his face, and it was, as I had known it must be, good: firmly sculptured, clearly revealing strength; did it also, I wondered, perhaps reveal obstinacy?

I looked closely; in a photograph more than twelve years old, a little faded and stained with time, it is difficult to judge nuance with assurance; perhaps what seemed obstinacy had been the complementary virtue of stubborn will power. That I could not decide.

I sat in a wooden windsor chair, beside the window.

'Le Commandant Bieler often slept in that chair,' Madame Cordellette said; and she added: 'He was a formidable worker.'

The attic and the café and the kitchen; no longer did the life of the agent in France carry with it a shred of glamour. I had seen the dark, cold attic where the transmitter was housed, the bare, gaunt little café where the agent lived, the homely, stuffy kitchen where he slept; it was here, it was here, it was here, I kept saying to myself. Here, here, here; and if all time exists, always, they are still here, and Mariette is opening beetroot wine and Guy Bieler is asleep in this chair and M. Cordelette is hiding papers in his files and the Gestapo is crashing in

with jack boots and rubber coshes, it is all happening now and will always happen. . . . There will never be an end to it, ever. And the muscles will quiver and the hands tremble always and not even death can put a stop to it, for it has happened and can never be undone.

It can never be undone; and I remembered the words *J'ai le cœur tranquille*, and thought that the heart would be tranquil always, too, and that was perhaps the root and the core of it all. The tranquillity of the spirit would, when time at last stood still, prove the final blessing.

CHAPTER XVI

I HAD BEEN DELIGHTED to get from M. Cordelette the name and address of Madame Guépin, who, it happened, lived at Colombes, a suburb of Paris that lay on the way to St. Germain-en-Laye, of happy memory. I had decided that I must, at all costs, meet Madame Guépin.

On that occasion, however, I had planned to spend only one day in Paris; there would be no time to contact her then and make an appointment. The best I could do would be to arrange a meeting when I returned to Paris, at the end of the month.

The next morning, I kept an appointment I had made from London. I went to see Monsieur X, who had worked for a de Gaulle Resistance group; he introduced me to a comrade of those days, Commandant Y, who told me he had traced someone who could give me information about Vera Leigh. I had, of course, sent Monsieur X, in advance, a list of the women whose story I was seeking.

Commandant Y asked me if I would go to his office, that evening, in order to meet this man, and hear his story. Would I be free then? I replied that I certainly would.

Next I went on to the rue des Pyramides, where was an organization closely concerned with the history of the Resistance. Here I got a list of the S.O.E. *réseaux*, neatly roncoed . . . still largely unaware of the frankness with which matters of the Resistance were dealt with in France, this astonished me greatly.

I had luncheon, next, with Colonel Jacques Adam, and his second in command of the *réseau* Jean Marie.

This I knew had been riddled with treachery; it was the group led by

Henri Frager, a patriot of irreproachable honesty and courage, but he had, with many others, been betrayed. The story of this is told inaccurately but in some detail by Hugo Bleicher in *Colonel Henri's Story*, and it is not pleasant reading: neither can I tell with certainty where truth may end and error begin.

It is, however, quite certain that the *réseaux* Jean Marie and Physician (this last the *réseau* of Prosper) were entirely compromised, and many of those who worked for them were well known to the Germans. According to Bleicher, Roger Bardet was the double agent initially responsible for German penetration; he had been condemned to death by a French Tribunal in 1949, the sentence later having been commuted to life imprisonment.

My interest in this squalid story lay in the circumstance that Vera Leigh and Andrée Borrell had both worked for these contaminated *réseaux*; Diana Rowden's arrest had been the result of the 'radio game'; Madeleine Damerment had certainly dropped to a German reception committee as a result of this 'game'; Yolande Beckman had worked for a *sous-réseau* under the direction of 'Prosper'; Odette Churchill had worked in close contact with Roger Bardet—it all appeared to tie up. Of the women whose story I was seeking only one, Eliane Plewman, was, so far as my knowledge then extended, free from any contact with Jean Marie-Prosper; and one was still unidentified.

It was, I think, that night in Paris, as I lay in my bed in a room whose windows gave view on to the floodlit Place de la Concorde, that this thought first struck me. Except for Eliane Plewman, I had good reason to suppose that all those women who had travelled together from Fresnes to Karlsruhe in the May of 1944, had been caught in the web woven in Paris by the German security forces and their network of traitors.

Did this, then, account for the special treatment meted out to them? The other women of S.O.E. who were murdered were murdered in concentration camps almost, if one may use the phrase, casually. Special precautions were taken to ensure the deaths of 'my' women, and with them Noor Inayat Khan, a radio operator of the 'Prosper' *réseau*.

Was this so, perhaps, because they might know too much about the German penetration of S.O.E. networks; were they murdered evilly in the months of July and September 1944, in order to make sure that they were not, by a sudden movement of war, liberated, and thus enabled to tell what they knew to their superiors in London?

Fascinating and macabre speculation; it had not come to me when I drove with Colonel Adam and his second in command to a restaurant in Montmartre.

He had, he told me, taken over command of the *réseau* Jean Marie immediately after the arrest of Henri Frager. That must have needed guts, for even then it was clear that there were traitors in the camp. Adam had accepted the risk; he had survived the last months of Occupation and after the Liberation he had formed the 1er Régiment des Volontaires de l'Yonne which had fought bravely against the enemy in the closing campaigns of the war.

He talked of this more readily than of his days of clandestinity; his bitterness against the French Milice was still strong. He said 'Some of them fought for the Germans after France had been liberated. We came across them sometimes and then we took no prisoners.'

Colonel Adam was a short, stocky man and might most vividly be described as a tough type. He had little use for the bourgeoisie; he had found good comrades amongst the patrician families of France and amongst the working classes, but the bourgeoisie, he said as he attacked a steak with savage gusto, were no damned good at all. . . . 'To them, we of the Resistance were bandits and thieves. All they thought about was keeping their property intact.'

He laughed; and I had the idea that property was not something he himself had much respected in those days.

'As for the rest, one had to be tough. Tough in a way you could not possibly understand. Sometimes one had to sacrifice comrades, friends, in order to save others who were more important. That was not funny. One became egoistic, hardened. If a car drew up at dawn, one leapt from bed, crept to the window. . . . It had stopped at the house opposite; one thought, simply, not me, today. . . .'

Not me today. . . . Again and again, those who had worked in the Resistance used phrases that stuck in the memory. Not me today. . . .

I was a little perplexed that Colonel Adam had not even heard of Vera Leigh or Andrée Borrell; this, I later concluded, was because he had assumed control only after the arrest of Henri Frager, and that was after the arrest of these two women.

About them he could tell me nothing; but he offered to give me the names of others who might help and we went off, luncheon finished, to the H.Q. of the *Amicale* Jean Marie in the rue de l'Université. Today, the building houses a laboratory; we reached the first floor by way of a wide, winding cobble ramp that had, in times gone by, been

used by horses which had been stabled upstairs. In the long room, bare except for a heavy table, some cupboards and chairs, was a huge photograph of Henri Frager. I realized, then, that the photograph of him that had been reproduced in *Colonel Henri's Story* must have been taken some time before his death. Here, in the *Amicale*, his photograph revealed a much older man, curiously, a less appealing man. His face was candid, broad and innocent, as that of a child; in the Colonel Henri book it had had in it a sensitive intelligence that time seemed, in part, to have blunted.

Colonel Adam got out his address book and wrote many names for me on a sheet of writing paper; this he stamped with the seal of the *Amicale*. I must, he told me, go to Courtenay, near Joigny, and meet one 'Bébé'; this Bébé could tell me much about Prosper and pass me on to the others.

And then he gave me a great sheet of thick paper on which was printed the Roll of Honour of the *réseau* Jean Marie; later, I counted the names. There were nearly 400. . . . *Mort en Déportation*; *Tué, Régiment des Volontaires de l'Yonne*; *Tué, Résistance*; *Fusillé*; *Mort suite déportation*; nearly 400 dead in one *réseau* alone.

That evening at six-thirty, I went to an office in the Avenue François Premier to meet Commandant Y and the man who had known Vera Leigh. When I left my hotel I had half an hour to fill in, so I took with me a copy of *Colonel Henri's Story*; I wished to re-read what he had to say about her arrest, in case it might be possible to check it with the man I was to meet.

There were several people in the office when I arrived, and though my name was announced, I cannot remember being introduced to the man I had come to see. He was tall, rather large for his clothes, had thin black hair and eyes like little round black currants set in a swarthy face.

He started talking very fast, about Vera Leigh. I do not think it useful to set down his story for I am unable to verify it. Part of it had been given by Hugo Bleicher, who had recounted how Major Boddington, second in command to Colonel Buckmaster, had made a visit to Paris in the autumn of 1943;¹ this was known to both the Sicherheitsdienst and the Abwehr. He was not, however, arrested and returned safely to London because, one assumes, the Germans rightly reasoned this would serve them best. Had he been arrested, London would have been suspicious of his contacts; the British would surely have got some

¹ In fact, in July-August.

glimmering of the extraordinary degree to which the German authorities had penetrated the Paris *réseaux*. It was best to do nothing that might arouse suspicion; and Major Boddington went safely home.

But, it seemed, some scapegoat was demanded; and the choice fell on Vera Leigh. She was courier to one Bastien—his real name I discovered later, was Marcel Clech—who was also to be arrested and die in German hands, and closely in touch with Henri Frager and, through him, with the traitors in the camp.

Henri Frager believed Bleicher to be a 'good' German, secretly hoping, and working for, an Allied victory. In the confused story I was told that day in the Avenue François Premier, I gathered that Henri Frager had warned Vera Leigh that Boddington's presence in Paris was known to the Abwehr, for which organization Bleicher worked, and the warning had been ignored. Later, when Boddington had returned to England, the Sicherheitsdienst discovered that some warning had been given to him in Paris and cried for blood; Vera Leigh had been involved in these events and thus it was she was arrested by Bleicher himself.

I listened horrified to this story of intrigue and treachery, marvelling, too, that the Abwehr and the S.D. should, apparently, have fought a triangular war both with each other and with London. I did not, and do not now, know how true the story was. But it is at least certain that Vera Leigh died because there were traitors amongst those she thought her comrades.

I had, however, been concentrating so hard on the threads of this astonishing narrative that my mind had no slack left free to deal with extraneous matters.

So I asked, automatically it seemed to me later: Do you know how and where she was arrested?

'Oh yes. She was arrested in the Café Mas in the Place des Ternes. I saw her that morning, and warned her; I told her if she kept her rendezvous there, she would be arrested. I told her to leave Paris at once. But she would not believe me.'

At this my brain succeeded in detaching itself from the task of following the tangled story of treachery and I became conscious that the man speaking to me had been telling his story in the setting 'I said to Bleicher' and 'Bleicher said to me' and 'So then I said to Bleicher'. And how had he known Vera Leigh was about to be arrested? He must, I realized, laggardly, have been concerned himself in these events.

I asked, 'How did the Germans know she had a rendezvous that day at the Café Mas?'

He shrugged his shoulders. Then I asked another question: 'Will you tell me—what were you called in those days?' He looked surprised and then answered 'Roger'; I felt unable to believe my ears. 'Roger?' 'Yes, Roger Bardet.' And then he said, 'There is a photograph of me in that book you have.'

He took it from me, and it seemed that everyone began talking at once, very fast. He ruffled through *Colonel Henri's Story*, and then he handed it back. 'No, it seems it was not included in this English edition.'

There was, I felt, no more to say. I do not think ever before in my life have I been more disconcerted. I made polite remarks to everyone, and I walked down the wide marble stairs. Roger Bardet and his friend followed. It was raining hard, it was the hour when a taxi in a Paris street near the Rond Point is as rare as water in the Sahara, and it was dark. Bardet and his companion got into a big black car and without looking at me drove away. I splashed off, down to the traffic lights, across the road, along to the Champs Elysées. The leaves were falling fast from the trees, and the lights of cars were reflected clearly from the roadway. I stood for a long time at the Rond Point, bemused; at last an empty taxi drew up beside me. I got in and sat down, still flabbergasted; 'Well,' said the driver turning round, 'where shall I take you?'

I had no plans, and no idea; I said, without conscious thought, 'The Café Mas in the Place des Ternes.'

The Café Mas is a big, bright brasserie, and that evening, it was full of big, bright people, all eating, so it seemed, large and nourishing meals.

I wondered what there had been on the menu that day in 1943 when Vera Leigh had been arrested. I was already beginning to realize that the France of the Occupation had been somewhat different from the France of my imagination; but I doubted if there had been big, steaming, overflowing plates of *choucroûte garni*, such as my left-hand neighbour was eating; or *wiener schnitzel* with two eggs on top, such as the man across the aisle was tucking in to; nor had there been, I suspected, a two-inch steak such as the frail girl on my right was about to attack.

I ordered a Pernod, and thought. I thought for a very long time. Presently I realized that the waiter was suggesting I might like to eat something; I ordered a dish, I cannot remember what. I went on thinking. The whole thing, I decided, was entirely ridiculous. Clearly, my

orientation was entirely wrong; I did not begin to understand France, or the war, or the Resistance. I was in an element beyond my comprehension. I had set out to trace the story of an English girl, murdered cruelly in a concentration camp because she had gone to the aid of France; and I had been led to a man who had, in December 1949, been tried by the Court of the Seine and condemned to death as a traitor. In 1955 he shone with prosperity.

I felt, in that moment, that the world was mad. I did not want any longer to move in such dark and filthy waters; I was, I think, a little frightened.

And then I remembered Odette Gobeaux and M. Cordelette and Madame Thixier in the Café Moulin Brulé; I remembered Mrs. Rowden in her white house high on a hill in Hampshire; suddenly, from the forgotten storehouse of my youth, I remembered Diana sitting on a white bed in an English manor, talking of a yacht anchored at St. Jean Cap Ferrat.

Sententious, with the better part of a good bottle of wine inside me, I told myself that that was life. It was not given to us all to play the hero; I must realize that it had not been given to all Frenchmen to play the hero in the years of Occupation. I must be resolute; I must face facts; I must be hard.

I called for my bill, and, of sudden impulse, I said to the waiter: 'Is there anyone here now, who was here during the war?'

He looked astonished, as well he might. Because I was tired, and perhaps a little drunk, I said: 'A woman, I am interested in, was arrested in this café in 1943. I wondered if anyone here now might have been here then.'

He looked at me very sullenly, I thought, and he said, 'No, no one. I was a prisoner, he was a prisoner, he was a prisoner. . . .' He jerked his head in the direction of the other waiters, white jacketed, leaning against the wall. 'The *patron* is new here. No one would remember 1943.'

'No one at all,' I repeated stupidly. I paid my bill and left.

CHAPTER XVII

NEXT MORNING WE left for Burgundy and the Jura. I had arranged with a well-disposed friend that she should get in touch with Madame Guépin, and ask if she would see me on my return to Paris later in the month. That seemed the most I could do, at the moment; I was content with my researches in St. Quentin and where Vera Leigh was concerned, I had at least been startled. Through M. Cordelette, I had learnt something about Andrée Borrell, and I hoped through Madame Guépin to learn a great deal more.

In the case of Diana Rowden, I had the address of the sawmill where she had been arrested, and the name of the family that owned it. I had also, from Colonel Adam, the name of a hotel near Dôle, now owned by someone who had, he said, worked for S.O.E. and might be useful; I had already realized that, as Bruce Marshall wrote of Wing Commander Yeo-Thomas, the world of the Resistance was small, and I was confident that these contacts would lead to others. On Eliane Plewman I had nothing; nothing at all. For Madeleine Damerment there could never be anything more; she had been arrested immediately on landing.

Thus primed, I left Paris; Courtenay, where lived the famous 'Bébé', was, fortunately, on our route. We reached it at about 4 p.m., and we went to have a drink in the only hotel of substance in the place. We were not immediately allured and thought to discover Bébé and if possible, alternative lodging; the question was: 'Where to find Bébé?' Colonel Adam had told me, simply: 'Ask anyone in Courtenay where Bébé lives, and that will be sufficient.'

I asked the girl in the bar, and she said I would find him in the elegant house whose grounds marched with those of the hotel. Easy enough, I said to myself, and walked up the stone steps, and across a tidy gravel drive. The maid, however, who answered the bell, said I was in error. M. Paguini—I did at least know that that was Bébé's formal name—did not live there; but I should ask at the Café des Sports just across the road; they would know.

By this time it was raining hard; I went to the Café des Sports, and found it empty save for a dispirited youth playing Russian billiards. I sat on a stool by the bar, and in the fullness of time a buxom girl came to serve me. I asked for an *apéritif*, and said I was desirous of meeting M. Paguini; she explained, accurately, where he lived.

Off again; this time I found the house after two or three false starts. But M. Paguini was not at home; the woman who opened the door suggested I should go and wait at the Café des Sports, for sooner or later he would visit it. Should he, by any strange chance, arrive home without having called there, she would tell him I would be waiting and hoping to meet him.

I asked about hotels, and was told the famous Café des Sports had some rooms; it seemed sensible to try and lodge there, for I had no idea how long Bébé might be in coming.

When we got back we found there were no rooms free. In fact, as I discovered later that evening, the Café des Sports was a *café routier*, and its rooms were occupied, day and night, for stretches of a few hours only, by the drivers of the great lorries that trundle endlessly over the roads of France.

Back, then, to our original port of call. We fixed rooms and, leaving M. who was suffering from a disordered stomach resting on her massive bed, I went back to keep my vigil in the Café des Sports.

This was not at all disagreeable; Courtenay is far, far from the beaten tourist track; it is France, and very rustic France at that. There were four men busily occupied with interminable rounds of *belotte*; there were youths playing Russian billiards; a great variety of men trotted in, dripping with rain, had a quick drink and trotted out again. One of them, somewhat to my astonishment, took up my rain-coat that I had hung on a peg to dry, put it over his head, and disappeared into the gathering dusk. Don't worry, a chorus of voices said; he's got to clear a gutter, and he'll bring it back.

I didn't worry and he did bring it back.

Presently *la Patronne* came in, chill from the river, her hair clinging tight round her face, her body soaked, surely, to the skin, holding her catch of fish. I warmed to her. I waited and waited and waited; after two hours, the door swung open to admit Bébé.

I was surprised by Bébé; I had expected a pillar of the village, and he was a thin, dark young man, diffident and shy. I explained once again my purpose; and we went to sit in the back compartment of the café, where a great fire burned, and a girl was darning socks, and delicious smells crept through from the kitchen.

Looking back I cannot think why Colonel Adam had said I *must* see Bébé; he was a charming and intelligent young man, but he knew nothing of the *réseau* Prosper, and he had had no contact with London until almost the end.

... however, get a picture of France under the Occupation that was new to me; of a rich, agricultural district, left largely to its own devices, where there was little if any want and where the Occupation was barely felt. There were no troops stationed in Courtenay, and no other representative of German authority. There were, thus, many collaborators. Is that a harsh word? Would it be more just to say there were many who did not change their way of life, who accepted facts as they were, who were concerned only with their own petty round, their own petty interests, who did not mind overmuch to whom they sold their produce, provided that the price was good?

I do not know: but it was clear that the Occupation brushed Courtenay very lightly; and there were few who, like Bébé, burnt always with a flame of rebellion and a desire to resist.

He was extraordinarily honest and quite without vanity. Nothing, he said, of any value was done until 1944; before that, those who resisted could resist only in the mind.

'I used,' he said, 'to walk around with an old revolver stuck in my belt, dreaming that I might one day have opportunity to use it against a Boche. But I was dreaming, for I had no ammunition; it was idiotic.'

If so, a noble idiocy, and a brave idiocy.

'Some of us,' he said, 'took to the Maquis in 1943; we went to a farm near St. Loup d'Ordon, on the road to St. Julien du Sault. We were the Maquis de Machefer, and there were about sixty of us; we did nothing that mattered until 1944, and then we were able to sabotage some railway lines and roads; the roads were not unimportant, for we were not far from a transverse route along which the Germans moved troops from the eastern provinces of France to the Normandy front. But we had no material—had we had material we could have done much more, but we had none. We had one parachute—and that was not intended for us, it was a mistake. It was dropped in daylight, and we collected it from the woods. But that was all we had.'

I asked how they had got in touch with London.

'Through Montargis; at the end we had contacts. But we got no material; perhaps we were unimportant.'

He was an amazingly modest young man, and he added, 'What we did, did not have much value. But I am glad that we had the *bon volonté*.'

But when he talked of events after the Liberation, he became more

cheerful. He had, with his comrades, joined the 1st Regiment of the Yonne—the Regiment of the *réseau* Jean Marie—and then, perhaps, there had been some value. They formed in September 1944, recruited solely from those of the Resistance, and they fought at Belfort, in the Vosges, in Alsace. That had been war, fought by men with arms, and that, perhaps, had value. . . .

I repeated slowly the names of the six women whose story I sought. Denise, he said, he thought he had met once; it might have been, but from the dates he gave me of his clandestinity, it seemed impossible it had been the Denise who was Andrée Borrell. Clearly, Bébé was a man of valour and conviction and integrity; but he was of little help to me.

Presently, saying that dinner would be waiting him, he took his leave.

I ate in the *café*; it was, I think, the most pleasant meal I had had in France since the war. This was France as I had known it, long, long ago, in the years of youth. The *bistro* and the fire, the check tablecloths and the knives with wooden handles, and the good, simple food, perfectly prepared. My bill, it is true, was for 350 francs; as I read it, I remembered that I had, in the summer of 1939, taken a friend to whom I owed hospitality to dinner at the Vert-Galant; I remembered that the bill, for an exquisite meal, accompanied by a beautiful wine, had been 180 francs. I was not shocked, for that was, approximately, what I had expected to pay; but I could remember thinking, as I put two 100 franc notes on the plate, that it was a *preposterous* price to pay for a dinner.

Three hundred and fifty francs for such a meal as I had just eaten at the *Café des Sports* in Courtenay was very, very cheap, in the year 1955. I told the *patronne* so, and I think she was pleased. I liked her much; she was not, she had told me, of that region; she had, just before the war, bought a *café* in Normandy and had lived to see it utterly destroyed. Undismayed, she had from some hidden resources scraped up the money to start again; and here she was in Courtenay. But her war had not been an easy one, and as she talked I sensed some element of contempt and bitterness in her attitude to those who had escaped suffering. Perhaps the gulf between those who have known agony and those who have not is thus always deeply drawn.

It was nearly eleven when I went out, into the dark, rain glistening streets; my purpose had not been furthered by that evening but it had not, I thought, been wasted. I felt I had met once more an

element that was precious to me, and that I had not known for many years; that of a France tranquil, whole and somnolent, untouched by the sword of war.

CHAPTER XVIII

FOR TWO OR three days I was engaged on more pressing business; only once was I reminded that France had known war, and that was in the pleasant little town of Quarré les Tombes not far from Avallon.

In the main *place* of Quarré there was a stone monument to those who had died in the Resistance and on it were carved the names of the various groups that had operated in the region: Group Castor, Eglantine . . . Group de Sabotage Bob. . .

Group de Sabotage Bob; that made me pause. John Starr had been known as Bob, and Quarré les Tombes was not a very long way from Dijon, where he had operated. Might this monument show that he and, therefore, Diana, had worked in this neighbourhood?

In the hotel where we spent the night, I asked the barman if there was anyone in the town who had worked for the Resistance, and who might be able to inform me. He scratched his head and consulted several old biddies who were seated on the benches; no, no one could think of a single name.

But surely, I said, someone must remain; you have that monument in the *place*; there must be some connection.

No, it seemed, there was none. Various names were mentioned; but X had died, and Y had left the district and Z had gone to live with his daughter. No one, if these good people were right, no one at all still lived in Quarré who had been of the Resistance.

In the next village, the schoolmaster might help. I found him, but he knew nothing. He suggested a farmer whose house lay some three miles up a muddy lane. I went there; but peering through the window of the farmhouse I saw that what appeared to be a harvest dinner was in progress. I withdrew. Only a man with a stick and a dog appeared on the road; he told me there were some graves of resisters to be found in the cemetery on the crest of the hill. In the slow rain I went there and found the graves of seven men of the R.A.F. whose plane had crashed nearby. That was all.

Well, I said to myself, *tant pis*. Later, in Paris, John Starr told me that the Group de Sabotage Bob had had nothing to do with him; so it cannot have had anything to do with Diana Rowden either.

We drove on and I occupied myself with other matters. The days went by and then we were ready to explore the country of the Jura. In so doing, we would visit Clairvaux and the hotel outside Dôle.

We drove across country, reached Dôle and found it disappointing; we studied the map, for Colonel Adam had told me the Hotel des Anglais was a few miles away, on the main road to the Swiss frontier.

That was identified easily enough; and we drove slowly along it, our spirits in good fettle, confident that soon we would see the hotel of the English. We drove a long way, far further than we had supposed would be necessary, and found no sign of it. After a while I saw a baker's van parked outside a *bistro*, and thought that the driver might be a fruitful source of inquiry. He did indeed know a hotel of the English, but it was on the further side of Poligny, not of Dôle. . . .

So we increased speed, passed through Poligny, and then, on the crown of a high hill with great vistas of mountain gorges before it, we came to our goal.

Here we were welcomed by the brothers le Chêne, and the wife of one, known as Adèle. All three had been of the Resistance; the husband of Adèle had been engaged in other subversive activity but Adèle and her brother-in-law Gregoire had both worked for S.O.E.

Thus, thanks to Colonel Adam, I was able to find for Andrée Borrell a friend such as Odette Gobeaux had proved for Yolande Beekman in St. Quentin.

Very seldom, I think, can the dead have eulogists such as these; and remember, these two women spoke of girls they had known only briefly and in stress of war. I remember now, and have no need to consult my notes, the words Adèle le Chêne spoke of Andrée Borrell: 'Not a day passes that I do not think of that young girl who was yet a great woman; she was brave, without blemish, modest and strong.'

Brave, without blemish, modest and strong. . . . It can rarely be given to the early dead to earn such praise; but I have no doubt that it was true of Andrée Borrell, every word of it.

Adèle le Chêne had, she told me, trained with Andrée Borrell in England with one of the first groups of women thus to be instructed

by S.O.E. Andrée had worked for two years in the Underground movement in France before she escaped to England. She had left only because she was so deeply compromised it was impossible to stay longer; she came out of France through Spain, and had suffered great hardships on the journey.

She had, Madame le Chêne added, made her escape from France in the company of one Dufour, who had, on arrival in London, been locked up in an underground prison beneath the Free French H.Q. at 10 Duke Street, and there tortured. There had been great excitement about this, great scandal, and Andrée had been very concerned. . . . It was not easy for her, either, for she was determined to work for the British and very strong pressure was put on her to work for de Gaulle.

Dufour; it rang a bell. When I got home I ruffled through some notes I had made from Catherine Gavin's recently published book *Liberated France*. I found these paragraphs, as I had summarized them:

'de Gaulle resented the intervention of the British Intelligence Service and its right to process all new arrivals from France through the so-called Patriotic School before they were interrogated by Passy. As early as February 1941, de Gaulle ordered Passy to give no information to the British. (Passy *Souvenirs*)

'When a volunteer named Maurice Dufour withheld information he had given to the British, he was imprisoned and beaten in the cellars of Duke Street. He escaped detention in the country through the help of a friend at Scotland Yard and, with the assistance of some disillusioned members of *Les Français de Grande Bretagne*, filed suit against de Gaulle, Passy and others. In return, however, for money compensation and facilities to enlist in the R.C.A.F., Dufour was persuaded to drop the suit just before D-Day, on the grounds that it might produce a bad reaction in France.'

So I said to myself; it was with this man, it seemed, that Andrée Borrell had escaped. It was interesting that both of them had had this unshakeable resolve to work for the British, and not for de Gaulle.

I got the impression that Adèle le Chêne, who must have been many years older than Andrée Borrell, had, during those months of training in wartime England, stood in relation to her as a mother. She spoke of her as one who needed, in certain ways, guidance. 'She was only a child,' she said; 'she came *des petites gens*, she knew little of the world. Before the war, she had, I think, worked in a shop in Paris. Sometimes she would, through ignorance, comport herself not quite

as an officer should; I would say, you must not smoke in the street when you are in uniform, and she would answer: I did not know. . . . I will not do that again. She was not of great education, and she was entirely wonderful, cool, calm, brave always, a good comrade for men, an excellent friend, but nothing more, you understand?

And she said again: 'Not a day passes that I do not think of her.'

Madame le Chène had herself landed in France in the autumn of 1942, coming secretly by felucca from Gibraltar together with Odette Churchill and Colonel Starr, the brother of John Starr, who also worked for S.O.E. She said, however, virtually nothing of her own service. Her husband here remarked, with good humour: 'I went in to the racket to get away from my wife, but she followed me.'

It would be idle to pretend that Madame le Chène spoke nothing but good of her superior officers in London; but that is another story. She told me many anecdotes and expressed many opinions, all of them fascinating and most of them extremely libellous. One thing might be set down, for I heard it repeated by others, and she was the first to say it; she regretted that Winston Churchill had not personally intervened to assure fair treatment for those French men and women who had worked for British Intelligence organizations. Anything he had asked then would have been granted; and he should have asked that. Had he done so, much injustice would have been averted. Why had he not spoken?

I could only answer that I could not speak for Churchill; but it seemed probable that he had felt it impossible to intervene in the internal affairs of France.

Poof poof poof, retorted Madame le Chène.

Before leaving, I asked the three le Chènes if they could give me any helpful names and addresses; several were jotted down, but they did not prove fruitful except in one case. I was given the name of a Frenchman who had worked for S.O.E., who owned a small hotel not far from the Rhône. At the time I thought I would be nowhere near it on that visit to France and slipped the note at the back of my file. In the event it proved useful.

So we left; I was sorry we could not spend a night there, but our itinerary led elsewhere. We shook hands and drove away, entering for the first time the great spreading mountains of the Jura. Everywhere close-cropped turf and pines and a sense of boundless space; this was the country where Diana had worked and spent the last free

months of her life. I wondered if she had found it good or whether she had been homesick for the Mediterranean, for oleander dusty beside a thyme-heavy road, fig trees, scrubbed, bare mountains and the scent of lavender?

CHAPTER XIX

FROM CHATILLON, IT was only a short distance to Lons le Saunier and to Clairvaux where Diana Rowden had been arrested in November 1943, together with the radio operator, Gabriel.

I knew a certain amount about the circumstances of this arrest, and it would be well to summarize them here; unless I was misinformed, they represented all that was ever officially known about the arrest of Diana and Gabriel; the Janier-Dubrys who owned the sawmill in which the arrests were made, told me they had had no contacts at all with anyone from the French Section of S.O.E. in London since the war had ended. As I will relate, it was I, twelve years later, who told them that Diana was dead.

In essence it is a story of impersonation; though with what degree of complicity between the true and the false it is impossible to say. An officer—a Frenchman—of S.O.E. was dropped somewhere near Paris, and was received by a German reception committee—the ‘radio game’ in action. He was taken first to Gestapo H.Q. in Paris, and shortly afterwards, together with a man who was to impersonate him, to Lons le Saunier. There the true agent, who had the code name ‘Benoit’, gave his distinctive overcoat, known as a Canadienne, to the false ‘Benoit’.

This false Benoit reached Clairvaux at 07.15, wearing the Canadienne and carrying a light brown crocodile skin briefcase. Shortly afterwards he arrived at the sawmill with Paulette (Diana Rowden). He was the bearer of a letter from Gabriel’s wife, in which she referred to various family affairs.

The false Benoit spoke somewhat evasively to Gabriel, and then said he had to go back to Lons le Saunier to collect a suitcase containing explosives. At 09.00 he left for this town, accompanied by a son of the house.

Within a short time, Gabriel left the house, too; he returned at 18.20 hours, when Paulette also returned with the false Benoit. Almost

at once, Gestapo officials entered the house, firing their revolvers. Gabriel and Paulette were arrested and taken away.

Madame Juif—another member of the family—then hid the crystals that were a vital component of W/T sets. An hour later the false Benoit returned, armed with a revolver and threatened her with death unless she revealed the whereabouts of the apparatus.

In spite of all this, only one member of the family was taken away—a Madame Pauli.

That was the story I had heard. The astonishing thing is that when I myself talked to the Janier-Dubrys, the Juifs and Paulis, they told a story that was radically different in many important points. It might be thought that the official story, compiled shortly after the events described had taken place, would be correct and that the story I heard after a lapse of twelve years was the one into which error had crept. But I am persuaded this is not so; the events of that November day were such that not one of the people involved could forget them ever. And the story they told me was so clearly detailed, so firmly corroborated, I am convinced it was true.

The facts I had, such as they were, were however enough to arouse in me great emotion as we drove along a narrow country road, through lonely, wooded country. We found the Janier-Dubry sawmill without difficulty, a group of buildings lying alongside a straight stretch of lane. The mill was working; and I asked a man pulling trunks of pine from a truck where I might find M. Janier-Dubry. He went into a wooden building, and came out a minute or two later, saying M. Janier-Dubry would be with me at once. Then he came towards me over the rough track; a wiry-haired, thick-set young man; I explained as briefly as I could my purpose in seeking him.

Immediately he took me into the house, saying his sisters and mother would be glad to see me; and I entered the dwelling quarters of the sawmill that had for many months been of poignant significance.

I must explain the family tree of the Janier-Dubrys, in order to make the story clear. M. Janier-Dubry, the father of the young man, the original owner of the sawmill, was then dead. He had had a son and two daughters. The daughters had married, one to a M. Juif and one to a M. Pauli; both sons-in-law had come to work at the mill and lived in houses around it. Madame la Veuve Janier-Dubry still, happily, lived, and completed the *ménage*.

I was greeted first by Madame Juif in whose house Diana and Gabriel had lodged; then Madame Pauli joined us, and Madame

Janier-Dubry, the wife of the son of the original M. Janier-Dubry, and then his widow. We sat in the kitchen and talked and talked. . . .

Talk is seldom coherent and never so when half a dozen people are recalling in animated circumstances a dramatic story some twelve years old. It would be best, however, if I set down the terrible details of that drama in logical sequence.

First—and this *must* come first, for it astonished me utterly—I must say that the Janier-Dubrys (I will give them all that name when speaking of them collectively) had heard not one word of news concerning Diana since the day when she was led from their house in handcuffs; not one word. It fell to me, all those years later, to tell them she was dead and, since they asked it, the manner of her death. When I said she had been murdered at Natzweiler Struthof, Madame Juif exclaimed: 'I went to see it a year or two ago; you know it is now a museum, a memorial to those who suffered there? It was terrible beyond all imagining; I felt ill and had to leave. Had I known that Marcelle had been there, I would have fainted. . . .'

Marcelle was the name by which Diana was known to them. I was able to say that she had not been imprisoned at Natzweiler, and there was reason to suppose that her months of prison had been endured in surroundings less terrible than those of that dreadful camp; she had been taken there only on the day of execution.

'*Tout de même, pauvre fille. . .*' said Madame Juif.

The beginning for the Janier-Dubrys of their connection with Diana was in August 1943; that was shortly after the arrest of John Starr, for whom she had worked as a courier. The neighbourhood of St. Amour, where he had had his headquarters, became too dangerous. As I learnt next day, Diana had gone from St. Amour to the tiny hamlet of Epy, hidden in the folds of an upland range of hills, where she had remained for three weeks. During that time, her colleagues of the Resistance had sought another safe house for her and had decided on the sawmill at Clairvaux. Gabriel had first operated his W/T there in the April of 1943.

I asked how it had happened that they had offered a roof to Gabriel; that was simple, they said, the views of M. Janier-Dubry had been well known. When the Resistance in Clairvaux was seeking a safe place in which to lodge a British radio operator it had turned to him, and, said Madame Juif, 'he had of course been delighted'. She said this with great simplicity, as though her father had been asked if he

would accept office as Mayor. She added: 'It was asked, too, that he should take charge of a great sum of money for the Resistance, but this he would not do. He had not got a safe.'

I think that if ever I were asked to reveal in a few words the essential character of the good Frenchman, I would tell that story. Of the man who was delighted to accept the most dangerous of all tasks in the Occupation, the lodging under his roof of a clandestine wireless operator, but who would not also accept charge of money, for he had no safe in which to keep it.

I would add that his family seemed to find this entirely logical and of good sense.

They spoke, round the scrubbed wooden table, of Diana in terms of loving admiration; she was brave and gentle and honest and kind. 'She always helped me with the vegetables, and in cleaning the house,' Madame Juif said. '*Enfin*, one could see she was not accustomed to such work, but it was her wish to be one with us, not to add to my burdens, to be helpful. The children loved her. . . .' And she turned to her daughter, aged fifteen, and said, 'You remember her, even now, *ma petite*?' And her daughter answered, 'Clearly; I shall never forget her.'

Of her work, they knew little. She had travelled much, but they had not, of course, asked her where she went nor what she did. They did know that once, on a journey to Marseilles, she had been close to capture; German police had entered the train in which she had been travelling and had made a thorough examination of all passengers. Diana had locked herself in the lavatory until the German officials had moved out of the coach where she was hiding. I was a little surprised that they had been tricked by such a simple ruse.

They realized, when she came to them, that the Germans not only knew about a 'Paulette' who was an English agent operating in the neighbourhood, but also had precise details of her appearance. For this reason she changed her hair style, got rid of her entire wardrobe and somehow acquired new clothing, and had then remained hidden in the house for some little time.

She also chose the name of Marcelle to take the place of the over-publicized name of Paulette, and the Janier-Dubrys had let it be known she was a cousin, recuperating from a severe illness. In any case, they said, Clairvaux was solid for the Resistance; no one asked questions.

I asked, as I felt I must, if Diana had ever given them the impression

that she knew fear. At once they replied most emphatically that she had not. On the contrary, sometimes they had felt her insouciance amounted to imprudence; she had, for example, smoked English cigarettes when walking in the woods surrounding the sawmill. Sometimes they had talked of the Gestapo and the tortures inflicted on its prisoners; Diana had said, 'I do not think I will talk. I am not afraid of them.'

'She was of a calibre one meets seldom,' said Madame Pauli.

Madame Pauli had been the only member of the family to suffer for the assistance that had been given to Diana and Gabriel and it seemed her arrest had been entirely inconsequential. When the false Benoit had arrived he had asked for Monsieur Pauli and had been told he was out; Madame Pauli had presented herself in his place. For this reason and no other so far as anyone concerned knew, she had been arrested with Diana and Gabriel and had been taken to Ravensbruck.

From that evil inferno she had returned alive, and, said her sisters jovially, thanks to the wonderful care she had received from the family doctor, was now stronger than any of them. She certainly looked extremely fit and powerful. They had heard not one scrap of news about her from the day she was arrested until the day shortly after the German capitulation in 1945, when they had received a telegram from Paris saying she was alive.

'We were wild with joy,' her sisters said. 'We had imagined her long since dead, though we pretended hope. That was the great day, for us; that and the day when the first armoured cars of the Allies rolled up the road from Clairvaux. Then we ran to greet them, mad with happiness. We stroked the metal sides of the tanks. . . .'

It is a curious sidelight on German behaviour, when one considers the wholesale slaughters carried out in communities that had erred against authority but slightly, that only one member of a family that had sheltered for months two British agents was arrested.

Of the events of the day when Diana and Gabriel were taken by the Germans, this is the story I was told:

Gabriel and Diana had, of course, known that a new agent was due to arrive, and they were both excited, for he would bring news from London, personal letters and probably some agreeable gossip. It is, indeed, easy to imagine what fresh contact with the lost world of freedom must have meant to those who had for months been leading secret, hidden and highly dangerous lives.

The false Benoit arrived at 07.30 and walked down the road past the house where the Juifs lived, and where Diana was lodging, to the house of the Paulis who were to have been his first contact. Diana had watched him, hidden behind the window curtain, as he moved down the road, and had said to Madame Juif, that must be him, that must surely be him. . . .

The false Benoit presented the proper credentials; instructions written on thin paper concealed in a match-box; he had a letter for Gabriel from his wife; they did not doubt him for a moment, not consciously. And yet Gabriel, it seems, had some instinctive sense of danger, for, according to Madame Juif, he spent all that day in her house and would not go out.

Perhaps this uneasiness stemmed from the fact that he had asked Benoit what they thought of him in London and Benoit had been evasive. Madame Juif was not of course in a position to know the implications of this question, but she had the impression that Gabriel was angry that so small a quantity of arms and ammunitions had been dropped to his region and was threatening to return to London. She felt that Gabriel was not entirely satisfied with the manner in which Benoit answered him.

Shortly after his arrival, Benoit said he must go back to Lons le Saunier to collect a suitcase he had left there. Diana told him that this was unnecessary, it was perfectly safe where it was; he had, however, insisted, and it was young Janier-Dubry who had driven him there. He told me this with a rueful grimace. Diana had also left the sawmill at that time; as I was soon to learn, she had spent part of the day in Lons le Saunier with a M. Clerc, of St. Amour.

It will be seen that the first discrepancy between the story I had learnt in London and that told me by the Janier-Dubrys concerns the movements of Gabriel. In London, it was thought that he had been out all day, whereas at the sawmill all were sure that he had not stirred from the Juif house.

He was playing chess, they said, when Diana and Benoit returned soon after 6 p.m.; Madame Juif was cooking dinner. They all talked together for a few minutes and suddenly the door was smashed open and the room was full of Germans: not of the Gestapo, but of the Feldgendarmarie. Madame Juif estimated there were about twenty men altogether, some of them armed with machine-guns; it was learnt later that the house had been entirely ringed by cars that had drawn

into position long before the false Benoit had led Diana back into the trap.

Unknown to her, he had been flashing a tiny electric torch behind his back as she walked up the road with him.

Diana and Gabriel and the false Benoit were all arrested, manacled and taken away to Lons le Saunier. No one at the sawmill ever saw or heard from Diana or Gabriel again; after the war the brother of Gabriel had come to visit them and had told them of his death in Buchenwald. But, until that morning nearly twelve years later, they had heard no word of Diana. It was then that I told them of her death.

For a moment they were silent; then Madame Juif said: 'As time went by, we knew she must be dead. Had she lived, she would have come to us or, at least, would have written. We had been through much together and she knew we loved her.'

When speaking of Diana, I had used the name 'Paulette', which was the name by which the Janier-Dubrys had first known her. It was when I had told of her murder at Natzweiler that Madame Juif asked me what was her real name, and I replied Diana Rowden; so, after those many years, they knew her in truth.

At the time of the arrests no thorough search was made of the sawmill and the surrounding houses; the W/T set was not found, for Gabriel had re-hidden it in a new cache, under the sawmill, that very day. This is a further detail in corroboration of Madame Juif's recollection that he had not been out, for she described how he had prowled around uneasily most of the day and had several times moved his precious transmitter always seeking a safer spot in which to hide it.

In the event, the Germans never did get it; the Resistance from Clairvaux came that night and took it to safety. But not before the Germans had made a further determined effort to secure it.

Now comes the most extraordinary feature of these events. In order that the true role of Benoit should not be discovered, he had been arrested with Diana and Gabriel; but, later that evening, just before midnight, he returned to the Juif house, and demanded that the W/T apparatus be delivered to him. He then made no pretence as to his real allegiance. One cannot but help wondering why. . . . His part had been played when he had secured the arrest of Diana and Gabriel; why he went through the farce of being arrested with them is inexplicable. He revealed himself in his squalid treachery when he went back to the Juif house; Gabriel was disillusioned when he was

confronted that night with the genuine Benoit. Why it was considered desirable that the masquerade should continue a second after the arrests had been made is a problem to which I can find no answer.

Nor, of course, could Madame Juif; she had been flabbergasted when the Benoit she had believed a S.O.E. agent came back, armed, and threatened her with a revolver.

These matters took a long time to tell; the hour of the midday meal was approaching. Madame Juif apologized that she could not invite us to eat; if only I had known you were coming . . . she said. I assured her that we were very well placed; we had a picnic luncheon which we would eat in the woods. She then invited us to come back later and drink coffee with her and meet her husband.

This invitation we gladly accepted and then drove on to Clairvaux for, in fact, we had not yet purchased our luncheon.

Clairvaux I found charming; a remote and rambling little village, yawning in the warmth of the midday sun. We walked past the shop of the butcher who had been a pillar of the Clairvaux Resistance and, a few doors on, found a pleasant little *épicerie* where we bought all we needed; as we ate, seated on a grassy bank, I thought sadly of Diana.

I thought too of Mademoiselle Mathieu, the tyrant of my school days, who had forced us by the lash of her tongue to learn French. Diana had spoken fluent French; she had been spared the worst of Mademoiselle's whip cracking. But, like the rest of us, she had trembled before her all-embracing rage.

As I broke bread idly, I remembered Mademoiselle Mathieu, who had been born in the neighbouring Vosges; she had retired there, not long before the war. We had none of us expected her to survive the Occupation; it seemed certain that she would have had no more fear of a German than she had had of a roomful of cowering schoolgirls. *Grossière créature*, I could hear her crying at some member of the Wehrmacht; ah, *quelle saleté* . . . two of her favourite terms of abuse when our grammar was false or our translation inadequate.

How could she hold her tongue for four years, we had asked ourselves? How did she . . . that we shall never know for, when the war was over and she crossed the Channel to visit England once again, her heart that had never before known irresolution failed her, and she died within sight of Dover.

How strange, I thought, how strange, that it had all ended thus; Diana murdered cruelly in France and Mademoiselle Mathieu suddenly shadowed by the presence of death as she sailed towards the Kentish

coast; and I, surviving, to bring these two separate threads of memory together as I sat on a grassy bank near Clairvaux within sight of the house that had for Diana been the last guardian of freedom.

When we went back after luncheon, we went to the Juif house, a square, well-caved building, resembling a Swiss chalet. Madame Juif and her husband lived in a flat on the first floor; her sister lived on the ground floor; the upper flat was reached by a winding outside stone staircase. It was down this staircase that Diana and Gabriel had been dragged by the enemy. . . .

M. Juif was a solid, fair-haired man, with most agreeable and kindly manners. We sat down round the large wooden kitchen table; the coffee was poured.

This meeting was different from that of the morning; then we had talked somewhat formally. In her own kitchen, with her husband and children, Madame Juif became relaxed and expansive; the thing that struck me most about her was that she seemed able to live with dreadful memory quite at ease. It was there; it was something that had happened; it had become part of the furniture of her mind as her stove was of her kitchen. Many times, speaking with people of the Resistance, this ability to master horror that had been endured bewildered and perhaps, in a sense, shocked me. It is difficult for those who have never lived in truth through an act of *Grand Guignol* to believe that time can nibble even at the structure of the rack.

When M. Juif pointed to scars in the woodwork of the kitchen dresser, scored by bullets, fired by '*ce faux Benoit*', I had consciously to force myself into comprehension. That it was here in this kitchen where I sat that Diana had been arrested; it was Madame Juif, pouring me another cup of coffee, who had seen it done; it was Madamie Juif who had stood, backed against the wall, denying she knew anything; and it was Madame Juif who had continued to live in that kitchen, prepare food there, eat there, sew there, mend socks there. . . .

This was an adjustment not easy to make; not for me, for whom clandestine war was something fought on alien soil. It was a drama one read books about, saw filmed on a screen, played on a stage; it was not easy to accept reality. That the drama had been played in a thousand kitchens like this, and when the curtain dropped and the lights went up, the cooking and the scrubbing and the ironing and the baking went on just as they had before.

No less incomprehensible was the courage manifest in the story the Juifs told me, as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world.



*The house near Clairvaux, the home of the Juif family, where Diana Rowden and John Young (Gabriel) were arrested.
Ink drawing by Muriel Juniper.*

When Benoit came back, shortly before midnight, Madame Juif was alone with her two children, one aged three, one a baby. He was accompanied by German officials, probably of the Gestapo, and they demanded the W/T set; above all, they demanded the crystals that were its most vital component. These were, I understand, removed after each transmission by the operator, and secreted on or near his person. As she stood, backed against her kitchen sink, Madame Juif suddenly realized, with a sick sense of disaster, that Gabriel kept his in his raincoat pocket, and that that raincoat was hanging behind the door, within touch of her hand.

'I stood there, saying "I don't know, I don't know, I don't know . . ."' she told me. 'I said "I don't know" to everything. The children were crouched under the table, crying. The Germans were firing their bullets wildly about the room; I was terrified they might, by design or accident, hit one of them. My daughter was sobbing, "*On va te tuer Maman, on va te tuer. . .*" I did not know, in truth, what I was doing: it was a nightmare. I just kept on saying "I don't know".'

I don't know . . . an easy phrase. It comes slickly off the tongue; I

... I don't know what time it is; I don't know when the next bus leaves; I don't know where the corkscrew may be. I don't know where the crystals are; it is not easy to understand that a woman had courage to say that, when she knew where the crystals were; when her children were in peril of imminent death; when to have said I do know would have put an end to torment; and when it would have been easy, so very easy, to persuade the heart that the damage was done, the operator arrested, that to speak would make no difference.

I am sure no such thought came into Madame Juif's head, then or ever.

She went on: 'The swine had started with the children's room, and had torn it to pieces searching. I thought that if I could, quietly, quietly, put my hand in the pocket of Gabriel's coat, and take out the crystals, and then hide them in the cot, they would be safe; they had already searched it. I did that. After a time they stopped threatening me, and went into another room. Then I took the crystals, and put them under the mattress in the cot, and put the baby back into bed. They were safe.'

Safe beneath the warm body of her child. The enemy never found them.

When she told me this, Madame Juif laughed; in the end, she said, it was for nothing, that farce—the Boches never even looked at Gabriel's raincoat! In the end, they left, saying we would be seeing them again. . . .

For a week, all those who lived at the sawmill were interrogated; every day for a week. Then the Germans went, and left them in peace, taking only Madame Pauli as prisoner.

But they took with them, too, everything the family had of value; jewellery, silver, linen, everything. . . . 'That is nothing,' said Madame La Veuve Janier-Dubry, speaking of her wedding presents, her trousseau linen, her family heirlooms. 'What are such things, when one has life?'

Then the young daughter, who had spent some weeks in England that summer, who spoke fair English and was clearly anxious to get some practice, fetched a large album and put it on the table. It was a touching document, in which some amateur artist had painted draped *tricolore* and Union Jack to preface the pages that told the part the family had played in the war.

There was a small photograph of Diana, and some newspaper cuttings; photographs of Madame Pauli immediately after her return from

Ravensbruck; a terrible photograph taken by the French police of a S.O.E. officer as he lay dying after treatment by the Gestapo.¹ This man had been of the same group as Diana. There were, too, pictures of the brother of Gabriel.

While I was looking at these things, Madame Janier-Dubry came into the room and put before me, on the table, a ring and a cigarette holder. She said, 'At luncheon, my husband asked me if we had not anything that belonged to Paulette that we could give you to send to her mother. I remembered these. . . . We had kept them, thinking one day Paulette would come back, or, if she did not, one day we might be able to send them to her family. But we heard nothing, and many years have gone by; I did not immediately think of them when you came. Here they are—give them to Madame Rowden.'

A ring and a cigarette holder; I wrapped them carefully in paper and put them, that night, safely in a zip pocket of my suitcase. When I got home I sent them to Mrs. Rowden. She wrote to acknowledge their arrival, and said they were precious to her. . . .

I thought then, and I feel now, that she might have had these little mementoes years ago. The personal possessions of those who die in battle are sent home to their next of kin; it might perhaps have been the duty of someone to collect and send back to relations such possessions as were left by those who gave their lives while serving with S.O.E.

Then I asked the Juifs one last question—did they ever learn anything more about the two Benoits, the false and the true?

To my surprise they answered—Yes. Of the false, they knew nothing; neither where he had come from, nor where he went. But they gave me the name of the real Benoit: I was to hear strange things about him that cannot be substantiated, so he must remain anonymous.

M. Juif pulled the album towards him and, from the back, took a newspaper cutting. It was dated, I think, January 1955; January or February—my notes of this cutting were torn, and the date obliterated. But certainly it was of 1955, and it said that the French authorities were trying to secure the extradition of the man named by the Juifs, against whom they wished to prefer charges. The cutting explained that these were in connection with his wartime activities; he had gone first to Canada, after the Liberation, and then, when extradition proceedings

¹ The French police were often, secretly, on the side of the Resistance. Such photographs were taken by them as evidence to be used when the day of reckoning came.

were started, he had taken flight and travelled to a South American country. Ten years later the French were still on his tail.

This gave me furiously to think; I had assumed that the genuine Benoit had acted against his will. He must, it was true, have revealed his contacts, his rendezvous, to the Germans. How else had they known to take him to Lons le Saunier, and from there how had they traced Diana and Gabriel to the sawmill at Clairvaux, unless he had spoken? But one knew the methods used by the Gestapo to make people speak; one could not blame the real Benoit that he was not a Yeo-Thomas.

The newspaper cutting altered all that; perhaps the real Benoit had done something rather different than talk under torture. Perhaps he had not been tortured at all. . . .

The Janier-Dubrys were inclined to think he had not been ill-treated. They thought something else lay at the root of the matter.¹

We rose to leave; then Madame Juif said, 'You must see the room Paulette used and the veranda at the back, where Jean escaped the night of the arrests. . . .'

Who was Jean? Jean was another member of the group. He had come, that night, to speak with Gabriel and Diana. He had crept round the back of the house, realized that something was wrong, had leapt over the balcony and, sliding down the steep ravine to the forest, had escaped.

He had made his way to Clairvaux, and warned his comrades there; they had at once organized the removal of the W/T set.

So we went through the house, to a large, simply furnished room, looking out on the spreading pine forests; I thought of the low-ceilinged, wooden-beamed room I had shared in a Surrey manor with Diana; I thought of her, twelve years later, sleeping in that room, the last room where she was ever to sleep in freedom.

Madame Juif touched my shoulder; she was happy here with us, she said; and we will never forget her.

Then we walked down the outside staircase, the staircase that Diana and Gabriel had walked, and before we got into the car, M. Juif said:

¹ I think it possible that this man shocked—in the medical sense—by his immediate arrest, and utterly demoralized by the discovery that London had made arrangements for his reception in France with a German-controlled W/T had, in fact, then done precisely what the Germans asked of him.

It was later reliably reported to me that he was on excellent terms with the Gestapo in Lons le Saunier; but I do not myself feel inclined to judge a man who had found himself in so fearful a situation, without knowing the full truth.

'The man you should see is M. Clerc, of St. Amour. He can tell you far more than we can about the work Paulette did; he was one of the group. Say we sent you.'

I replied that I would indeed call on him, where did he live?

Everyone in St. Amour knows him, they said. He is *marchand de vin*; ask anyone.

Then Madame Janier-Dubry pointed to the forest and said: 'Paulette loved to walk in the woods; when she was in hiding here, she would slip out, often, and walk for hours. She was safe there, for the forest is thick. Gabriel also, he would walk with her. It was the only distraction they had. They thought, too, that if the Boches ever came for them, they would have a few seconds warning, and would be able to slip out of the house and down into the forest. *Hélas*, when it happened, they had no opportunity.'

Madame Juif added, 'The children loved tobogganing down the log slide behind the house. Paulette often played with them. She was as tough as any man, and as tireless as the children themselves.'

Then we shook hands all round; and left.

CHAPTER XX

ST. AMOUR I had long wanted to visit; friends had told me that it was a charming little town and an excellent centre from which to see the Jura. They had also told me it was the home of a particularly heavenly Beaujolais. It had, therefore, been in my mind for some time to see it, and I thought it a curious chance that Jean Overton Fuller had, in *The Starr Affair*, mentioned that John Starr had for some time lived in an old château in the hills above St. Amour. I presumed from this that Diana Rowden had probably visited it too.

St. Amour, on arrival, was delightful; it was a charmingly haphazard little town, with an irregular *place*, and a multitude of small, winding streets, faced with pretty houses. We had a look at the two hotels, one in the *place*, one in a side street; neither, I will confess, seemed remarkable; we plumped for the one in the side street, a decision I was later to regret.

As soon as I had settled on a room, deposited my bags, washed and attended to my somewhat disordered *coiffure*, I went out to look for

M. Clerc. He lived, as it happened, only a few hundred yards away, in a flat above a great wine store that flanked an ancient courtyard.

I walked into the courtyard and seeing a thin, black-clad woman I asked her which was the house of M. Clerc. She introduced herself as Madame Clerc and told me her husband was out. Once more I explained my purpose; immediately, she invited me upstairs and into her home.

As we talked, I remembered my fears that those from whom I might seek memories of Diana would have forgotten her; as Madame Clerc spoke I knew it would have been as reasonable to fear that a mother might have forgotten her first-born child. She was, now, of these people, as a daughter, as a sister; her memory was real and strong and alive, and the love they felt for her was still true and undiluted. Nothing had been forgotten, nothing.

We talked together for half an hour or so; then Madame Clerc asked me where I was staying. I told her. She said: 'Then you should call at the Commerce, as you are not staying there, and see Madame Laurencin. It was there that Paulette stayed when she arrived here, and where she spent many other nights before she moved to Clairvaux. My husband met her for the first time in the Commerce; he was, you know, one of the earliest of the Resistance in this region.'

Then I regretted that I had not elected to stay there; I said I would walk round and see Madame Laurencin, and arranged to return to the Clercs after dinner, when M. Clerc would be at home.

In a side street, on my way to the Commerce, I passed a stationer's and, needing to send home some postcards, I stopped to buy a few. The first that caught my eye was one of the *château Andelot-les-St. Amour*; a magnificent aerial photograph of a tall, narrow mediaeval castle, guarded by two great circular stone towers. This, then, was the *château* where John Starr had stayed, and Diana; for Madame Clerc had mentioned to me that she had often walked up to Andelot to visit them.

I bought this postcard: not to send home, but to keep. I bought, too, a postcard that showed a corner of the *place* of St. Amour, and the *façade* of the *hôtel du Commerce*; a tall, well proportioned building, with wrought-iron balconies. The jigsaw puzzle that had, for so many months, been fragmentary in my imagination, acquired another piece. Diana had, I knew, landed from *Lysander* near Tours; had travelled at once to the Jura; now, I knew, she had travelled to St. Amour; and the postcard in my hand showed me the roof beneath which she had found shelter.

I made my way to the *place*, and walked through the doors of the Commerce; a short, dark-haired woman met me, and I asked for Madame Laurencin. I am Madame Laurencin, she replied.

Yet again, I told my story. We sat down at a marble-topped table and talked. She had, she said, lodged many members of the Resistance; it was simple enough, she just did not enter their names in the hotel register. She had never entered Diana's name, there was nothing to show she had ever stayed there.

'They were not difficult to fool,' said Madame Laurencin, speaking of the Germans, 'if one kept one's wits. I put these people in rooms at the back; they could get on to a roof, and from that down the back of the hotel and so escape, if things became hot. But it was never necessary. We had no trouble at all.' Then she said: 'I will show you the room I always gave to Paulette.'

We went upstairs and along a dark corridor; in a sense, I regretted that we had not decided to lodge at the Commerce. Yet, I felt, I would have been pursued by macabre speculation had we done so. Suppose I had been given Diana's room; had slept in the bed she had used on her first night there in June 1943; I would have stayed awake, re-creating, as best I might, in the imagination her own thoughts. She may never have known fear; but I might have done, lying there in the darkness, knowing the tragic destiny that awaited her as she stretched on the same bed, stared, sleepless perhaps, at the same high ceiling.

It is not within my powers to put in words the emotions of that September journey through France; it was as though I had come face to face with the Moor of Venice, his hands still tensed around a fragile neck; as though, in Elsinore, the corpse of the Prince of Denmark still lay crumpled on the rough stone flags.

All, then, became real to me; this was the house, this the kitchen, this the bedroom, this the bed. The desperate adventures set coldly in print became quick, and the words on paper reality. . . . Writing of John Starr, Jean Overton Fuller had said: 'They managed to fix him (Gabriel) up in a medieval château up in the hills above St. Amour. . . . Then Starr came to stay in the château. He found this old castle a very weird place to be living in alone. . . .'

Since reading those words, I had identified St. Amour with Diana; in the imagination it had been real to me. When I saw it, it had no common feature with the figment of my mind; for it was a genuine little town, set amid genuine hills, and I had seen it as a cardboard

fantasy. When I had spoken on the telephone with John Starr in Paris, he had told me he had first met Diana in a hotel in the *place* of St. Amour; for a week, I had cradled in my mind a picture of that hotel, and the picture bore no resemblance to the Commerce.

I had re-created, in imagination, the events I had read about; when faced with reality, the tidy little fantasies were brushed away, and tragedy was no longer words in a book, but real and strong and pricking.

So I felt in the dark, sombre room where Diana had slept in the summer of 1943; it was as though I had looked through a looking-glass and seen not a reflected picture but a vision true and undistorted.

The France of the looking-glass had become familiar; Baker Street, with its luxury flats; Beaulieu, and the house deep in the cool dark woods; Wanborough, cradled in a long, slow sweep of hills; Meoble, austere and lonely set against a background of great mountains; Tempsford, where tractors moved sluggish over land that had once carried runways. . . . This had been the framework; this, and the people I had met who had sat in England, planning, scheming, directing. . . .

But the reflection shown in the glass; that had had no reality until I came to France, and then the fantasy became true and the shadows took shape. St. Amour had been a name for me; it might have been a town where I had stayed one night, had searched out the heavenly Beaujolais, and had gone on my way in the morning, carrying with me a picture that would, in a year or less, have grown dim. Now I would remember it always for this bedroom in which I stood; a room in a hotel in a town in France, used by commercial travellers and businessmen and tourists, which had once been, for a brief spell, the background of tragedy.

It was then that I got the first glimmerings of a truth that later in Paris, and, later still, in London, was to become self-evident; that the Resistance in France was not a series of State papers, locked up in a Ministry, where they might conveniently be shielded from prying eyes. It had happened in France, and the people who had been of it still lived, some of them, and went about their lawful occasions. London might seek to pretend that the work of the French Section of S.O.E. was a State secret, that its archives must remain for ever unseen in some dark cellar; London might, if it wished, further delude itself that the French end was a State secret too, locked up in the strong rooms of the Quai d'Orsay. But I knew better; the French

side was not immured in State papers. It lived, and worked, and cut wood or sold wine or ran a *bistro*; it was there, accessible, to anyone who might seek it out.

It was, in brief, a matter of flesh and blood and not of words on paper.

So I ruminated; went out into the dusk, to see the sky soften over St. Amour, and light slip quietly from the cobbled streets. I went back to the hotel, and made some notes. Later, with M, I dined at the Commerce; and, around 9 p.m., I went back to the Clercs.

M. Clerc was at home; a big, burly man, red-faced, dressed in a shirt and breeches, with the look of a farmer or farrier. He was, perhaps, the man who knew most of the matters that concerned me, and could tell me most; he proved invaluable.

For himself, he had started Resistance in a small way right at the very beginning. He was a wine merchant; he covered regularly a large region, calling at restaurants, cafés and *bistros* where he sold his goods. His attitude to the defeat of 1940 was simple; either one accepts this, or one does not. . . . If those he spoke with seemed to accept it, he let it go; if they did not, he at once started discussion as to what could be done to turn defeat into victory. From the beginning he had but one thought: that whilst salvation must, in the end, be brought from outside France, the happy day when the Germans would be chased away could be brought much nearer if men and women inside France worked actively to secure their own release. He never, I think, deviated from this reasoning, nor doubted that victory would, in the end, be achieved.

He remembered very well when Diana Rowden, whom he knew as Paulette, arrived in June 1943; she had spent many nights under his roof. In August, he was forced himself into hiding, following the arrest of John Starr, and he stayed in hiding until the region was liberated; with him, also in hiding, was his wife; their small daughter they had sent to relations who lived far away.

Starr they knew as 'Jean Pierre', and they remembered him too; he had been betrayed by one 'Martin', a double agent working for the Germans. This Martin had later been shot dead in a café by 'Pedro', a S.O.E. officer, as he sat reading a newspaper; Pedro had shot him through the opened pages as he held them before his face. Pedro was, himself, later to lose his life.

The Clercs had another, and stronger, reason to remember Martin; it was as a result of his treachery that M. Clerc's father was arrested

too. Fortunately, he survived his imprisonment, but his health was gravely impaired and he died a few years after the Liberation.

Of Diana, the Clercs, like the Janier-Dubrys, spoke with warm affection and respect; she was, they said, without fear, charming, gentle, courageous, always pleasant to have in their home. They re-awakened the doubts that had beset me earlier in my quest, when they said that her French, though admirable in an Englishwoman, was not perfect; she could not, they thought, have sustained a long conversation and be taken by French people as a Frenchwoman. On this, Madame Clerc was explicit; it was, she said, perfectly safe for Diana to go up the road and buy some bread for her; but it would not have been safe had she been forced into a long and complicated discussion with someone who might, had they suspected her for what she really was, have been ill disposed. On the subject of Gabriel they said that his French was execrable; very fluent, but spoken with an atrocious accent that shrieked Englishman at every word.

M. Clerc, of course, had known a good deal about the work Diana did; she had travelled as courier to Marseilles, Lyons, Besançon, Montbéliard, Paris . . . she had often accompanied him to parachute grounds, when arms were to be dropped; she had been a good friend and comrade to all the local maquis; she had, in brief, been a tireless worker, and without fear. . . .

I asked where parachute drops had been made, and took out my Michelin Map 70. M. Clerc bent over it, and, with a pen, marked five crosses. One was just by the château of Andelot; another to the south-west of St. Amour, hard by a hamlet named Chamandre; the third was to the south-east, beneath le Point Lancette les Granges; the fourth to the north, near Orgelet; the fifth lay south-east of Lons le Saunier, near Blye.

As I looked at those pin points on a map I had bought to guide my tourist way through France I was filled, yet again, with a sense of incredulity; it was too much to ask that the mind should accept, in sober truth, such far-fetched stories. We had, I realized, that day driven close by one of the dropping grounds, had stopped to admire the view. Now, it seemed, I must force myself to believe that, one night in 1943, the companion of my schoolday dormitory had bicycled there with this heavy, thickset man, had set lights and flares and waited, patiently, in the dark for the sound of an aircraft carrying with it a load of arms and explosive that would, if all went well, float down to where she stood.

This, I reflected, was a truth more difficult to believe than any fiction.

M. Clerc was enthusiastic about the dropping of arms; they had, he said, in the end received plenty of ammunition and, he added with modest satisfaction, they had he thought made good use of it. 'We did Peugeot,' he said; by which he meant the group to which he belonged had, with the co-operation of one of its chief officials, sabotaged the Peugeot factory at Sochaux then making tank turrets for the Wehrmacht.

If, as M. Clerc told me was the case, Diana had played her part in making this operation possible, her sacrifice was not a useless one.

More—M. Clerc told me that the Maquis he had joined when driven into hiding had later liberated a great region, and then had formed itself into the 159th Regiment of Infantry; he said to me, speaking of the part it played in the winter campaign of 1944-5, 'that too was a result of Paulette's work; she helped to get us arms when we were in hiding; she helped build our morale; the 159th Regiment owed much to her.'

I can see no reason why M. Clerc should, spontaneously, have paid this tribute if it were not true; and I think that it was.

We then talked of the arrest; the Janier-Dubrys had been able to tell of the actual event; M. Clerc was able to tell me a good deal about the background, the history that led up to disaster and the results that followed it.

Clerc had, himself, gone into hiding with his wife, as I have related, in August, following the arrest of John Starr and the denunciations of the traitor Martin; the château of Andelot had, then, in the vernacular of clandestine activity, been 'blown', and was no longer safe; Gabriel and Diana had left it for good. Gabriel, I think, went straight to the sawmill at Clairvaux; Diana had hidden for a while at Epy, a remote hamlet some three miles to the south of the château. She had, it seemed, followed the theory that the safest place for a flea to hide was in the lion's ear.

After three weeks, she moved on to Clairvaux; and, from August until her arrest in November, Clerc was closely in touch with her. He had, in fact, had a drink with her in Lons le Saunier on the very day she was taken.

As he spoke, it became abundantly clear to me that the machinations that lay behind the arrests were of an extreme complexity. The

false Benoit, for example, had spent the evening before he went to meet Gabriel and Diana at Clairvaux with M. Clerc in Lons le Saunier; M. Clerc was, then, in hiding, but the false Benoit had known how to contact him. In spite of this, Clerc had not been arrested; this may have been bad staff work, or it may have been that the Germans thought he was more useful to them if left at liberty.

I would hasten to add that this remark should not be read as a reflection on M. Clerc who is a patriot of the highest integrity. The point, simply, is this: a known agent is a very much better thing than an unknown agent, so far as counter-espionage circles are concerned. An agent, once spotted, can be followed, his contacts noted, his dispositions tracked; but if he is arrested, his colleagues disperse. It must be assumed moreover that another agent will be sent to take his place. This agent may succeed in eluding the counter-espionage services; he may remain free to perform his work, and he may do much harm. It is, therefore, often the aim of a counter-espionage organization to leave known agents at liberty as long as possible. They can be kept under observation, their circle penetrated and at the appropriate moment, all can be safely gathered in.

This was the case when Nicholas Boddington visited Paris in 1943; the Germans certainly knew he was there, and where he was. They thought it served their purpose best if he were allowed to return to London unharmed; had he been arrested, the extent to which the German counter-espionage services had penetrated the Paris groups might have been suspected.

So it may have been with M. Clerc; the Germans may have thought it wisest not to arrest him too. On the other hand it may, I would repeat, have been a case of bad staff work; he may genuinely have slipped through their fingers.

Be that as it may, the false Benoit had met M. Clerc the night before Diana and Gabriel were arrested; Clerc had not been suspicious of him. On the day of the arrests, Clerc had met Diana in Lons le Saunier, and had had a drink with her, and with the false Benoit. Benoit had asked how things were in the region, were the Gestapo efficient, was Diana frightened? And she had answered, No, the Gestapo interpreter Schneider was on 'our' side, and tipped them off when action was to be taken.

Schneider; that rang a bell. I had read about Schneider, the Gestapo interpreter. I asked Clerc what had happened to him? He owned, he replied, a café on the outskirts of Lons; I should visit him. . . .

Once again, I had the feeling of the gambler who puts his money on zero and sees it turn up. . . . I said I certainly *should* visit him; M. Clerc offered to take me next day.

A little breathless, we continued our talk. Clerc told me that he had not at once learnt of the arrests; the day following them a message, purporting to be from Diana, had been telephoned to the house of his sister, who was in touch with him. She had passed this message on, but, with the curious intuition of danger that developed so often in those engaged in clandestine work, he smelt that something was wrong.

He was asked to meet Diana in the Café Strasbourg, and he decided to go; his sister went with him. As soon as he went through the door, Clerc knew something was very wrong; a comrade, one M. Mathy, who was to die in deportation, was there, with Germans on either side of him. M. Mathy, Clerc said, did not flicker an eye, or show the slightest sign of recognition; neither did Clerc. He knew that the only course open to him was to sit down, as though he were an ordinary customer without a single shadow on his conscience, order a coffee, drink it, pay, and go out. This he did.

Immediately afterwards, he left for the hills.

As we talked, Madame Clerc sewed; she had a lovely face, with a quality of pale transparency and an expression of great sweetness. From time to time she, too, added a recollection; of Diana helping her with her household chores; of the many duties they performed together; of the splendour and the tragedies of those months when they had known each other.

It was she who said that Diana had had no fear; often, she said, we would climb together up to the château, and it was a stiff grind. Diana would say, 'After the war, I will come back in a big American car, and we will shoot up this hill like a rocket'; she had truly thought she would survive, and come back, in a world at peace.

Before I left, we drank a good bottle of wine from the Clerc *caves*; I arranged to meet M. Clerc next morning, to drive to Lons le Saunier to meet M. Schneider. I asked, were they sure Schneider really was on our side? And Clerc answered: 'I owe it to him that my wife is alive today, and our child; it was he who got word to her, after I had been forced into hiding, that she too was about to be arrested. . . . There can be no doubt where his allegiance lay.'

So we went out into the shadowed courtyard, with a fountain pointing a stone finger to the skies. The road was very dark, and I

was glad that M. and Madame Clerc had insisted on accompanying me back to the hotel; as I stumbled over the rough stones, I thought of Diana walking those same cobbles, twelve years before.

CHAPTER XXI

THE NEXT MORNING was fine and fresh, but a low mist hung over the valleys as we drove back to Lons le Saunier; M. Clerc was dressed in his Sunday best, and appeared even more robust than he had the day before; he drove with great verve.

We passed through Lons, and, on the far outskirts, came to a café, perched beside the road above a flight of stone stairs. This was the café Schneider; and M. Schneider himself came to greet us; soon we were sitting together with a bottle of Alsatian wine on the table. M. Schneider came from Alsace, and it happened thus that he could speak German. On the wall I saw a framed certificate that revealed he was a member of the Legion of Honour.

It was a relief that someone else could explain my purpose; M. Clerc did this with despatch, and soon we were once more engrossed in talk. I was, yet again, struck by the clarity with which these people could recall events many years old; in a sense, this is not surprising, for I do not think I would myself forget any detail had I played in any such drama. And yet, as they talked, it was as if all had happened yesterday; the memory persisted in holding fast all detail. Nothing, nothing at all, had faded with the passage of time.

M. Schneider remembered Diana and Gabriel and the November of 1943 very well; it had been Diana's remark to the false Benoit, whom she had thought true, that had revealed to the Gestapo the double part he was playing. He had had to skip from the camp very quickly as a result.

He had, he told me, also had a drink with Diana on the day she was arrested; she knew him well, and he her. When however he had that evening been summoned to Gestapo H.Q. and asked if he knew a Paulette, he had replied he knew many. The Germans said, 'the Paulette of the Resistance'; no, he replied, he did not know that Paulette.

In fact, at this time the Gestapo must have known, through the false Benoit, that he had been playing a game with them.

Schneider also told me that Gabriel had been ill-used by the Gestapo; and then he added a detail fascinating in the illumination it gives of the German character.

Some officers had, it seemed, started work on Gabriel in the office of the colonel commanding; and he had looked up petulantly and said, 'I won't have you torturing people in this office; go and do it somewhere else.'

And they had.

These simple phrases; I won't have you smoking a pipe in here, go and do it somewhere else. I won't have you torturing people in here . . . The one of no more significance than the other.

Gabriel and Diana had spent only one night at Lons le Saunier; next day there were instructions that they were to be taken by car immediately to Paris. A message came to say they had arrived. That was all he knew; his own position was by then, he realized, compromised.

Schneider and Clerc then speculated about the two Benoits—the false and the true. Of the true, Schneider said he had that night dined with the Gestapo officers, and he had seen them drinking and laughing and singing together. . . .

The identity of the false was never established; it was believed he came from what was described to me as the Anti-Communist Bureau in Paris. Nor did they know what had happened to the true Benoit after that; but they had read in the papers that he was wanted for questioning by the French authorities at the end of the war. They quoted from the cuttings the Janier-Dubrys had shown me.

The people concerned in these events discovered the following December that they had been duped, when Pedro arrived with a photograph, sent from London, of the true Benoit. Clerc then realized that he was not the man he had spoken to that day in Lons le Saunier.

As we drove back to St. Amour, Clerc said to me: 'It was not, you know, a pretty business.' He looked at me, as others, in London, had looked at me; I felt something of a ninny, someone who poked an ignorant snout into matters she could never hope to understand; but in M. Clerc, there was no malice, simply, I did not understand what it had involved. He added, 'What Schneider did was no easy thing; evidently, he had sometimes to stick a dagger into the heart of a comrade. His was the key position; he was the most invaluable link in the chain; to safeguard it, he had to sacrifice others. That is not pretty, nor is it easy.'

... , I could see that. Neither pretty nor easy.

M. Clerc drove me back to the hotel; before parting, I asked for directions to reach the château, and the name of the good lady in Epy who had sheltered Diana. Informed on these points, we said goodbye; we were to meet again, however, by chance that afternoon.

M had been sketching; the sun shone, and we turned the car in the direction of Andelot.

The drive up to the château was steep and arduous; I could imagine what it must have meant to do it on foot, day after day, in the heat of summer; I could well understand why Diana had had thoughts of powerful American cars as she toiled up the narrow lane.

As we mounted, the great vista of the Jura opened before us; I was able, then, to see virtues that had been hidden as we drove along the valley roads. It was a landscape of great strength and austerity, and of immense prospect; the mountains rolled in majestic formation away, away, into a heat-heavy horizon; beyond, hidden from our eyes, lay Lake Léman and the Swiss frontier. How strange it must have been, to have looked, during the evil days of Occupation, towards the territory of Switzerland, a country inviolate still and at peace. That close proximity to safety, to a land where one might sleep peacefully at night, nor ever fear a hand laid upon the knocker, must have intensified the strain for those who had voluntarily come to France, I thought; to be within sight of security, and yet never think of it, must have made its own demands upon the resources of the spirit.

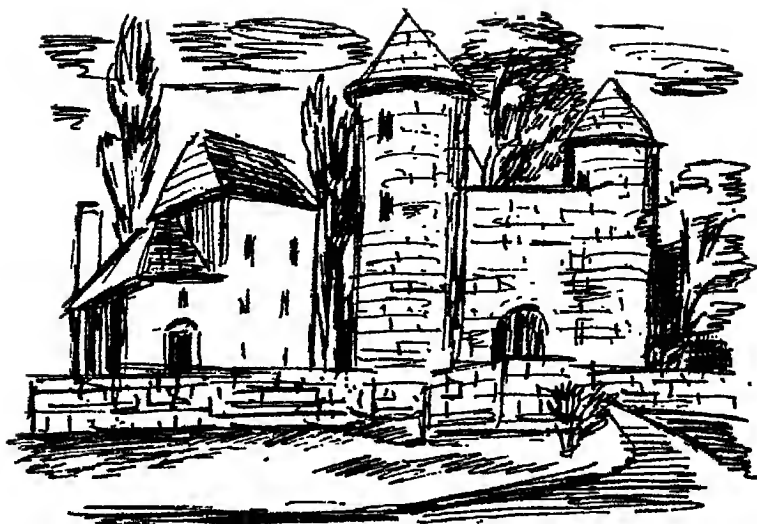
The château of Andelot, when we came to it, was one of the most beautiful I had ever seen; in its slender, yet massive form, it reminded me of a Scottish keep, and, indeed, the surrounding landscape was not dissimilar from parts of the Highlands.

We drove up a fast-rising lane to the keeper's lodge, and parked on a broad gravel drive. A man, dressed in blue jeans, came out to meet us. I explained why I was there; I said that a friend of mine, an Englishwoman, who had been known as Paulette, had hidden there during the war; his jaw dropped, and his eyes widened: he had misunderstood me and thought that M, still at the wheel of the car, was Paulette.

'We had been told she was dead . . . , ' he said.

'She is,' I replied, 'murdered in Natzweiler Struthof.'

'But I thought . . . ' He still looked astonished. 'I thought you said that was her, in the car.'



The château of Andelot-les-St. Amour, where Diana Rowden worked for a time in clandestinity.

Ink drawing by Muriel Juniper.

'No,' I said, 'that is a friend of mine from London. We have come to see, if we may, this castle where Paulette worked.'

'Of course, of course. . . .' The caretaker's welcome was very true and warm. 'As you wish. It will be a pleasure. . . .'

The sun, high there in the hills, was hot. The approach to the castle was guarded, as I had seen on the postcard purchased in St. Amour, by two tall circular pepperpot towers, connected by a high stone wall. In this was set a heavy wooden door, that had once opened a passage across a drawbridge; we walked through it, into an enclosed garden, and facing us were the twin buildings of the château itself. They rose, narrow, tall, grey against the blue sky; and to the right was a row of vine-entwisted stables, converted, with exquisite taste, into living quarters. Beyond them there was a great terrace, the walls of the hill falling sheer beneath it, and from this lofty vantage point the vast panorama of rolling hill lay before us, stretching far, far into the midday haze.

I do not think I have ever seen a more magnificent view spread before the eye; I put the map down on the stone wall that guarded the margin of the terrace, and saw that I was looking towards one of

the dropping grounds marked by M. Clerc; it was, then, in these surroundings that Diana and her comrades had waited patiently at night for means of release to fall swiftly from the skies.

The caretaker offered to show us inside the château; it belonged to Americans, who came back each summer to live in it for a while, and this annual visit had but recently ended. He did not know their address, and I have, therefore, been unable to write and thank them for their unwitting hospitality. Should ever they read this, I hope they will accept my gratitude now.

Inside the château, we climbed up the broad stairs until we came at last to a vast, echoing attic, and from it a view that surpassed even that we had seen from the terrace. But my thoughts were elsewhere; here, I was told, the W/T apparatus had been stored; here Gabriel had sent out his messages to London. Here, too, I imagined, Diana had sometimes stood and waited whilst the winged words went out across the dark night of France to a land where the skies were still free.

How poignant those moments must have been, I reflected, to those who waited; to stand alone, in danger, hunted and, perhaps, afraid, and be conscious of a thin and tenuous link that bound the lonely flesh with a world still warm and peopled with friends. It must have been dark and chill in that attic, even in summer; and no light must chink from it, to reveal perhaps to enemy eyes that it was inhabited.

It was August when the security of this refuge was compromised; Madame Laurencin had told me that the last night Diana slept at the Commerce had been the 15th of that month. The Germans discovered the use to which the château had been put, and raided it; Diana and Gabriel had flown, but the caretaker, who had harboured them, as he had harboured John Starr, was arrested, and died in captivity. His name was Bouvard. *Requiescat.*

We walked out again into the sun; at the invitation of the caretaker, we ate our picnic luncheon on the terrace, fed, too, by the beauties of the landscape that lay before us. When we had finished he came back, with his wife, and we talked; they told us that the brother of Gabriel had come there, several times, and had been there that summer; we had, indeed, missed him by only three weeks. They gave me his address and I wrote to him when I got back to London; but got no answer.

I liked greatly this caretaker, his wife and children; and I was touched that they knew, so well, the story of the château in the summer of 1943, that the name Paulette had been an immediate key

to their friendship. I felt, as we said goodbye, that Gabriel and Paulette, whom they had never known, were nevertheless alive for them.

From Andelot to Epy was a matter of three miles or so; and when we drove into that tiny hamlet, folded quietly in the rolling hills, we found a scene of great activity; a bicycle race was, it seemed, about to commence and there on the fringe of the crowd were M. Clerc and his wife. At once, they led us to the little *bistro* and shop run by Madame Rheithouse, who had given sanctuary to Diana when she had to fly the château. We ordered glasses of beer, and stood at the broad wooden counter, and talked.

Madame Rheithouse spoke of Paulette as the Janier-Dubrys had done; she was gentle and brave and pleasant always. 'She helped me serve in the shop,' Madame Rheithouse said; '*enfin*, one could see she was not used to such things, but she said it would prevent her from feeling bored. . . .'

I wondered if I too might have feared boredom, when I knew the countryside to be in uproar, and German forces everywhere searching for me. I thought it improbable.

Diana had stayed three weeks with Madame Rheithouse, and when she was there the Germans came to search for her; luckily, she had received warning of this, and was hidden elsewhere. When questioned about an Englishwoman, one Paulette, believed to be concealed somewhere in the neighbourhood, Madame Rheithouse replied she had never heard of such a one. 'I swore that,' she said, 'on the head of my child; I knew that God would understand and forgive me.'

Then she went out for a moment, and came back carrying a cheap little scarf, patterned with flowers. 'There,' she said, 'hold it. That belonged to Paulette; she gave it to me, when she left, so that I would remember her. *Pauvre fille*; in winter, when it is cold in bed I wear it round my neck, and put my face in its folds. I wish it were possible to give back to her the warmth it gives me.'

Always these words of simple dignity; as though simple people were moved to speak of the untimely and heroic dead in terms almost biblical in their splendour. I wish it were possible to give back to her the warmth it gives to me. . . . They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. . . .

I felt the thin stuff between my fingers; it was, I thought, as though this small, elderly countrywoman felt in her bones the dark, cold loneliness of the grave and wished to bring warmth to it.

So we turned southward, away from the Jura, towards the great

highway of the Rhône. I had other, more urgent work to do, and only one more name stood on my list, that I might still visit.

In the late afternoon, we came to the margins of the Saône. Here, in a small hotel, was a Frenchman who had worked for S.O.E. during the war, and who had been taken back to England, by Lysander, for training. From what I had been told of him, I did not think it likely that he would know anything of the people I was interested in; but as we had, in any case, to pass hard by his hotel, there could be no harm in calling there.

This was, in the event, the only distasteful visit I made; the only one where my reception was dusty. A gimlet-eyed and disagreeable woman met us; when I asked if I might speak with Monsieur X, she replied that he had been unwell, and could not be troubled. What did I want, anyway? I explained then, briefly, the reasons why I wished to see him. She looked cross, but went inside the squalid little inn, and shortly afterwards X came out to where we sat under a tree, drinking Pernod.

At first, he was extremely difficult to deal with; he was bitter about his experiences in S.O.E. and said, several times, that it was idiotic to suppose that any Englishman, or men, could possibly teach anything to a Frenchman who had already learnt much about clandestine activity in the hard school of reality.

I tried to steer his conversation into the channels that interested me, and mentioned that I had met several S.O.E. people in Lons le Saunier. He brightened a little then, and said he had trained, in England, with one 'Maugenet'—and that was the name used at that time by the real Benoit. He had, he said, been captured on landing, and taken to Lons le Saunier; from other details he related of this 'Maugenet's' history, I knew that this was indeed Benoit. And X confirmed that he was in reality the man whose name was on the cutting M. Juif had shown me.

This was an unsatisfactory meeting in all other respects; I felt, for the first and only time, unwelcome. There was in X still a residue of some acid deposit that had long corroded the tissue of memory; he did not want to speak to me, nor to recall the past. While this was an attitude easily comprehensible, X's manner of conveying it was disagreeable. Yet, when I rose to go, he smiled very pleasantly behind his thick pebble spectacles.

It was this that I remembered, as we turned towards the dusk, and the massive, fast flowing waters of the Rhône.

That night, I slept in a room that looked over a tangled mass of tiled roofs on to a courtyard and a tall chestnut tree; in the distance I could see a glimpse of water as the river drove its way south. I thought long and hard of the people I had seen and the things I had heard. The Resistance, I then realized, had been a small, tightly clenched world; the great majority of French people had known nothing of it, nor wanted to. Yet all the men and women of the Resistance I had met had, with the possible exception of X, shown themselves as the salt of the earth; strong, courageous, kindly and possessed of an inner tranquillity of spirit that nothing could corrupt. They had, I realized also, kept themselves to themselves in peace as in war. They felt, I believed, that those who had resisted from the beginning had no need to beat a drum; that their laurels had been torn from them and bedraggled by those who had joined the movement at the very end, when victory was certain, but that this was of small consequence. They did not long for laurels; they were content that they possessed, each one of them, *le cœur tranquille*, and could live at peace with it.

The strength of the Resistance had, I realized too, varied greatly from region to region; I remembered Courtenay, surrounded by rich agricultural country, where there had been little hardship and little Resistance; no Resistance at all, in fact, until 1944.

I remembered St. Quentin and the Jura; they had had by far the best 'feel' of any region I had yet visited. Hard, firm, resilient; and the Resistance widely spread, closely interwoven in many lives.

In the south it was, I found later, different. There were many memorial stones to men who died with the F.F.I., but I met no one anywhere who had had anything to do with it personally, nor had known anyone who had. . . .

People shrugged when I asked about the Resistance, almost as though I had asked about something not quite respectable. There was no hardness there and no strength. Perhaps, I concluded, it depended as, in the end, all human enterprise depends, on the individual. The strength of Resistance in France, from region to region, had perhaps grown from a few good people; where they existed, determined, from the hour of defeat, yet to achieve victory, they built around them an ever-increasing network of comrades dedicated to the same task. In areas where this hard core did not exist the land lay fallow; where there were Thixiers and Lefevres and Clercs and Janier-Dubrys, the seed they sowed quickly took root and flourished greatly.

It needed everywhere and always, a leader; there were leaders enough in the industrial north, and in the mountain provinces of France; perhaps in this, too, there was a lesson if one chose to learn it.

CHAPTER XXII

TEN DAYS LATER I went back to Paris, flying from Marseilles. Arrived there I had much other work to complete; I had only two visits scheduled in connection with this book. One to the headquarters of the *Fédération Nationale Libre Résistance* and the other to Madame Guépin at Colombes. Madame Guépin had, I knew, worked for the *réseau* Prosper; she had known Andrée Borrell; she had agreed to see me and a date was set for our meeting.

I travelled to Colombes from St. Lazare, recalling the many journeys I had made over the same line in 1947; the war had, then, been nearer by eight years and yet no thought of it had concerned me as I travelled towards St. Germain during that golden autumn, the first I had known in France for close on a decade. My thoughts, then, had been all of the present and the future, and it had been enough to be in France, and see the leaves change from red to yellow and drop from the trees, and smell the scent of wood-fires rising from the autumn gardens. I had not thought, at all, of the war.

Now I came to Colombes to prise, if I could, secrets from a past already twelve years old; I crossed the railway line and walked down a stretch of road and came to the house where Madame Guépin lived. She had a flat in a comfortable old house, and when she opened the front door I knew I was once more in the presence of greatness.

Madame Guépin was a small, thin, dark woman, with a sharp, pointed little face carrying an expression of great sensibility. She had suffered very heavily in Ravensbruck, and her health had been permanently undermined as a result; yet I felt that this had been a price she had paid without regret. She was born of that breed that cannot compromise with honour; for her, there had been no alternative but to play the part she felt integrity and patriotism demanded. I remembered Mademoiselle Gobeaux who had said, 'I knew my duty.'

Madame Guépin, too, had known her duty; I marvelled not that

she had known where this lay but that she had, as had Mademoiselle Gobeaux, accepted its burden without hesitation.

Her story was, in its outline, simple. She had been the companion, as M. Cordelette had told me in Fonsommes, of the Englishman, George Darling. Together, they had from the first day of the Armistice in 1940 sought means of continuing the battle; but it was not until 1942 that they had got into touch with Prosper and through him with London.

Of Prosper, Madame Guépin would not permit even the faintest breath of criticism. The story of the disaster that overcame his *réseau* in June 1943 has been told; it has further been suggested that, when confronted by the enemy with sure evidence that he had been betrayed, he had as a desperate gesture revealed the names of all his comrades. It was clear to him that the enemy knew almost everything about him and his group; and he had filled in the last gaps in the picture in return for a promise that if he did so the lives of all those concerned would be spared.

It would seem that this is, in essence, the truth; and in that terrible dilemma, knowing himself utterly betrayed, no blame can lie with Prosper that he took this action believing it to be the last straw at which he could clutch; the last hope that existed for those who had trusted him and had unwittingly been led into disaster.

But Madame Guépin would have none of this; Prosper never spoke a word, never, she said. He was interrogated for sixty-four hours at a stretch, forced to stand, without food, without water; and yet he never spoke. The traitor was another, a Frenchman . . . and she told me his name.

Since then I have found means to consult a number of papers relating to this affair; I am not persuaded that Madame Guépin was right in accusing this man. Whether or not he was innocent of the defections with which he had been accused, his position in the *réseau* would not, I think, have enabled him to hand over all the information that was undoubtedly given to the Germans concerning the Prosper group.

I was, however, moved that Madame Guépin should defend Prosper with such warmth; she had suffered much as a result of the events of June 1943, but her loyalty to him was inviolate.

The story of the death of George Darling, whom she loved, is related thus in the book *La Sologne au Temps de l'Héroïsme et de la Trahison*, by the Abbé Guillaume; this work records, in great detail, the history of the *réseau* Prosper.

Having described the arrest of Prosper, the Abbé says:

'Prosper was interrogated in the house of the S.D., 84 Avenue Foch, by Karl Langer, Dr. Goetz and Josef Placke over a period of forty-eight¹ consecutive hours, in order to obtain from him the whereabouts of his arms depots. In circumstances that are still mysterious, he ended by giving them the position of the depot at Trichâteau, in the care of Darling. He then wrote a letter to Darling, in which he asked him to hand over his arms to the bearer. Dr. Kieffer then organized an expedition to Gisors, under the command of Lieutenant Keller, supported by Karl Langer, Josef Placke and two or three other Germans. This detachment, which was driven in two open cars, was accompanied by a group of French agents of the Gestapo carried in a lorry; this last consisted of Lucien Prévost, Roger Dupré, René Lefèvre, Jacques d'Arcangues and some others.

'The lorry separated from the cars, and drove to Darling's house; here the leader gave him Prosper's letter. Darling did not question this order that came to him from his chief; and, assuming Prévost to be an agent of the *réseau*, he got into his car and followed the lorry to the wood where the arms were hidden. These were then loaded on it.

'An hour later, the Gestapo stopped the lorry when it drove out of the wood. Darling, who was following in his car, realized he had been betrayed when he saw Prévost move to the middle of the road and attempt to stop him, crying Hands up! He at once sought to make his escape, driving his car forward at full speed; Prévost and Keller then fired at him. Darling, seeing that some lorries were blocking the road, turned into a mud track, and drove off rapidly. He had, however, been hit and did not get far; an hour later, he was found lying in the forest, gravely wounded. Langer and Placke had him taken without delay to a hospital in Gisors, where he was immediately operated upon; he had a bullet in the liver. Josef Placke was left to wait by his bedside, but he died the next day.

'When the expedition to Gisors returned to Paris, Prosper was told of these events, and of the death of Darling . . . he then, in the course of further interrogation, gave the position of all the arms depots and the names of those responsible for them in Méru, Hirson, Origny-en-Thiérache, etc.

'The *réseau* Prosper was dead!'

It was in this fashion that George Darling died; and I must

¹ Madame Guépin says sixty-four hours.

emphasize that Madame Guépin, who was thus tragically bereaved, denies absolutely that Prosper was to blame. She had in him entire and perfect confidence.

Moreover, she was herself placed in extreme danger by these events; she fled her home when Darling was killed, and, hiding in the *bergerie* of a nearby farm, lay low whilst the Germans scoured the district. By, as she says, a miracle, they did not find her; and she was able to make her way in due course to Rouen, and so back to Paris.

She was at liberty for another six months; then, following the arrest of Yolande Beckman and Guy Bieler (who, it will be remembered, worked for a *sous-réseau* of the Prosper group), she too at last was taken. She was, she told me, interrogated for twenty-two hours at a stretch; as Prosper had been, standing, beneath fierce lights, without food or water. 'I was lucky,' she said; 'I was the last of my comrades to be taken; there was nothing left for me to reveal. The Germans already knew everything. I was not tempted to speak for there was nothing I could say; and in the end they realized this, and did not torture me.'

Then she told me how, when her monstrous ordeal was ended, the German officer who interrogated her rose to his feet, clicked his heels together, and said: 'We have to protect ourselves from women like you and Denise (Andrée Borrell); but we admire you. . . .'

'*J'étais gonflée,*' Madame Guépin said.

She then endured imprisonment in Ravensbruck and was later sent as slave labour to an aircraft factory, with three young Frenchwomen, also of the Resistance, who were her protégées in adversity.

'I felt responsible for them,' she said, 'as a mother.' She smiled, and added, 'They called me *Maman*, and still do . . . they are married now, and we are close friends.'

She told me how, when all at the end was disintegration in Germany, she had escaped with her three 'daughters' and had walked 160 miles across the ruins of the Third Reich to avoid falling into the hands of the advancing Russian forces. . . . They crossed the Elbe under shellfire, and reached the Allied lines; it was, she said, very disappointing that the first Allied troops they had met had been Americans; she had wanted to be liberated by the British.

And she said: 'Now, recalling that adventure, that miraculous escape, I am quite certain we were protected by a divine power; it is inconceivable that we could have succeeded without it.'

For a moment we sat, silent. Then Madame Guépin said: 'It is true,

I had lost all; I had nothing to live for.' From this I deduced a sense of fatality; a belief that had she still had something left that might make life attractive to her, she would surely have died. It was the very fact that all had been taken, that if she lived she must live stripped bare of all human comfort, that ensured her survival. . . . She had seen so much taken, so many people die who had so much to live for, it had borne in her the conviction that to wish life was to ensure death. Only those who had lost all were granted a further span on earth.

But I would not stress this; it is only an impression I received. And, indeed, Madame Guépin was still intensely vivacious, and could tell, with unforced relish, grim stories of her days of clandestinity.

She recounted how the Germans had once come to her little country house when George Darling and Archambault, the radio operator to Prosper, were both there. They had received warning, and both men took to the woods. It was only after the German troops had arrived that Madame Guépin remembered that Archambault kept his crystals in the saddle bag of his bicycle; and the saddle bag was lying on the table. . . .

Her sang-froid had been equal to the occasion; she had greeted the German soldiers kindly, explained that M. Darling was out, and would be desolated when he returned to find he had missed the honour of this visit. . . . In the meantime, welcome to her poor house; had she known they were coming, all would have been tidy; now, if they would but excuse her. . . .

As she talked, she had swept up various scattered objects, knitting, papers, a basket of vegetables . . . and the saddle bag. Talking volubly, she had withdrawn, taking these things with her. In the passage, she had hesitated, for a moment petrified, wondering where to hide the incriminating crystals. Then she had run to the larder, and put them at the bottom of a bowl of eggs. . . .

All, therefore, was well. But when Darling and Archambault had returned to the house, after the departure of the Germans, Archambault had been distraught. He had remembered, almost at once, where he had left his saddle bag and what was in it, and as they had hidden in the woods, he had repeated, monotonously: 'If Renée is caught as a result of my damn' stupidity, I'll cut my throat, I swear I will, I'll cut my throat. . . .'

His relief and exultation, when Madame Guépin told him how she had tricked the enemy, was unbounded.

On another occasion, she told me, German troops had come to

search the house, and had found a powerful headlight, taken from a motor-car; her colleagues used this for parachutages, and she mentioned, *en passant*, that many drops went astray for lack of powerful ground flares.

Immediately they saw the headlamp, the Germans had become suspicious. Why was it there? they asked. Madame Guépin had blushed, wriggled, prevaricated; this merely intensified the German questioning.

'They were simple country louts,' she said, 'not bad types, according to their lights. Finally, when driven into a corner, as they thought, I dropped my eyes, and said, "well, you see, it is illegal. . . ."

"Illegal?" cried the Germans, feeling themselves on the verge of a *coup*.

"Yes, I am afraid, yes, illegal; you see, we go out with it at night, to fish; the light attracts the fish, and we catch them. I am very much ashamed to admit this; it is illegal. . . ."

The German soldiers were country bumpkins; poaching was something they understood. They had laughed heartily, and the lamp was forgiven.

By such anecdotes Madame Guépin, unconsciously, revealed her quality; I do not think she can have understood what they meant to me, who had never lived through such events. She spoke of them naturally, as something that had happened, and might have happened to anyone. I truly do not think it occurred to her that her stories revealed her as a most unusual woman.

After a little while, I asked her what she had known of Andrée Borrell; and at once her face softened, and she spoke with great feeling.

'She was a wonderful girl,' she said; 'and entirely without fear; she would undertake any task. For the enemy she had complete contempt in the sense that nothing would deflect her from what she felt her duty. She did an immense work, and I tried to get her a decoration; but she received nothing. . . .'

Nothing at all; neither the British nor the French conferred on Andrée Borrell a single decoration of any kind. The British recommended her for the M.C., and, authority decreeing that this was for men only, she was then put up for an M.B.E. This was not awarded; nor did the French give her the *Croix de Guerre* or the *Médaille de la Résistance*.

It is, I think, worth quoting the citation in which she was recommended for a posthumous *Croix de Guerre*; it reveals, at least, the measure of her services to France:

'Andrée Borrell who, in 1939-40, was a member of a hospital unit at Beaucaire, organized with one of her chiefs an escape route via Spain. A number of Frenchmen who wished to join the Free French Forces were able, thanks to her, to achieve their object.

'At the beginning of 1942 her group was compromised. She decided then to escape herself to England, with her chief. After many adventures, she succeeded in crossing Spain.

'After her arrival in England, she underwent a severe course of training (she obtained the rank of lieutenant, General List) and was then parachuted into France on 24 September 1942.

'She at once made preparations for the arrival of Suttill, the chief of the *réseau* Prosper, whose activities she shared, effecting liaison between the different sectors of this *réseau*, taking part in parachute drops, sabotage, the transport of arms, radio transmissions and was always ready to undertake delicate missions; she showed indomitable courage and a true contempt for danger.

'Arrested on the 23 June 1943, by the Gestapo, whilst a radio transmission was in progress, she was held in close confinement in Fresnes until May 1944.

'She was then taken with three young Englishwomen to the concentration camp of Natzweiler where the Germans, having given her an injection, threw her into a crematorium in July 1944.'

The distribution of honours is, one knows, a chancy business; those who receive none often deserve them most. Nevertheless, I cannot help feeling that Andrée Borrell had earned a decoration; to her it might, probably, have meant little, but it would have been a solace to her relations who feel, I know, a little hurt that no official recognition was ever given of her great services.

Madame Guépin then talked at some length about the events that had led to the arrest of Andrée Borrell; she was, certainly, as well placed as anyone to know the facts, but the implications behind them are so complicated, so diffuse, I feel it useless to attempt to set them down in full.

Briefly, it is enough to repeat, once again, that the *réseau* Prosper had been thoroughly penetrated by the Germans, and that it is certain that Prosper himself, Andrée Borrell, Archambault and other members of the group had for some time been closely tailed by enemy counter-espionage agents.

There is no evidence that Andrée was tortured by the Germans; probably they knew all they wanted to know of her activities. She was

imprisoned in Fresnes, and succeeded in smuggling letters to her sister. . . .

Did Madame Guépin, I asked, know where this sister lived? I had written to an address in the rue Caumartin, and had received no reply.

She said that she certainly did; and she gave me an address in the rue Rochechouart. I decided that I must meet this sister, Madame Arend, before I left Paris.

I had by then talked with Madame Guépin for a very long time; it was dark, and I had to make my way back to Paris. So I said my farewells, and went out into the ill-lit street. Just up the road, I found a flower shop still open, and I went in and arranged that a sheaf of gladioli should be delivered next day to Madame Guépin. On the accompanying card I wrote: *avec mes hommages* . . . they were words that came from the heart.

CHAPTER XXIII

I FOUND THE TELEPHONE number of M. Arend in the Paris directory and put through a call; Madame Arend answered. As had been the case before, I was struck by the matter of fact way in which she accepted my explanations and readily agreed that I might come and see her. She seemed to take it quite as a matter of course that a strange Englishwoman should, eleven years after her sister's death, want to come and talk about her. I telephoned on a Friday, and it was not convenient for Madame Arend that I should call during the weekend; I was leaving Paris by the Night Ferry on Monday, so I arranged to call on the afternoon of that day.

I also managed to get in touch with John Starr, and he too invited me to visit him; the only possible time was the Monday afternoon, and I arranged to see him after I had called on Madame Arend.

These engagements made, I went to the headquarters of the *Fédération Nationale Libre Résistance*; there I met a charming Frenchman who had worked for S.O.E. during the war; he had been taken by the Germans, and treated atrociously; signs of his physical sufferings were still visible.

He saddened me, for he said, without bitterness but with great feeling, that those French people who had worked for the British-controlled *réseaux* of the Resistance had received, after Liberation, a

very curty deal. They had been considered little better than traitors; they had worked for Perfidious Albion, not for France. . . .

Making all due allowance for exacerbated French *amour propre*, this attitude is difficult to understand or to condone. The simple truth is that after the capitulation of 1940 Britain was the only hope that was left for France; her Free Forces were fed, clothed, equipped and given sanctuary by Britain, and to accuse French people who worked for us during those years of treachery is a grotesque injustice.

This ex-S.O.E. Frenchman gave me much evidence in support of his contention that he and his comrades had suffered for the work they did for this organization; he, too, as had Adèle in the Jura, brought in the name of Winston Churchill. Had the great man interceded, in 1945, all might have been very different; but no finger was raised, and no word was spoken. The injustice went unchecked; and the work done, far from being rewarded, had been reviled.

This was saddening; it was terrible to think that those people I had met during the last few weeks, who had worked with, or sheltered, S.O.E. agents, might have earned calumny and not honour when at last they achieved their sole purpose, the Liberation of their country.

The week-end came; on the Saturday I had luncheon in the restaurant in the Avenue Marigny where, on 11 May 1940, I had lunched with refugees from our Embassy in Brussels.

I thought of Diana, and I wondered what she had been doing on the morning of 11 May 1940; when I had finished my coffee I walked out into the street, round the corner to the rue des Saussaies, to the huge building of the Ministry of the Interior that had, during the Occupation, been used by the Germans; in it many captured men and women of S.O.E. had been interrogated, amongst them Diana Rowden.

It was a great, grey, bleak building, and even on a sunny afternoon in late September it looked gaunt and forbidding. A fat *flic* stood outside, beneath a *tricolore*, and turned a mildly inquisitive eye on me as I paused, and looked up at the shuttered windows. I tried to imagine the prison van drawing up, and Diana walking across the pavement towards her inquisitors; my heart beat a little faster, and in that moment I felt ridiculous that vicarious emotion could quicken in me thus. Whatever had been suffered in that building had been suffered, and was long since finished; time had moved over the tortured and the torturer, and now all was immersed in the deep passages of history. As I turned away I wondered if, somewhere in the world,

the torturer still lived and breathed and felt the sun, when the victim had long since turned to ashes, and no longer knew the comfort of warmth on the shrinking flesh.

A taxi passed; I stopped it, and asked the driver to take me to the Etoile. It was by then about three in the afternoon, and all was golden and quiet. I got out of the cab at the top of the Avenue Foch, and walked down it, through the avenue of trees, where children played with conkers and old people sat sunning themselves sleepily.

I came to number 84, the building that had for four years lodged the Gestapo; it was a handsome, five-floored house, a little dwarfed by huge blocks of flats that had recently been built beside it. It looked innocent, there in the autumn sun, the town house of a rich man, where all should be ease and calm. But I could not imagine how anyone could live in it; the evil it had known must be in it always.

Next day I lunched with a friend, and was late for my appointment with Madame Arend; I had to telephone apologies; then I leapt into a taxi and went to the boulevard Rochechouart. Here I lost more time, for I had been taken to the wrong address; Madame Arend lived in the rue Rochechouart. I did a great deal of chasing up and down stairs, in and out of courtyards, before retreating to a *tabac* to look up the address again in a telephone directory.

Then I tore off down the street, and arrived, eventually, nearly an hour late.

Madame Arend I liked immensely; at once I felt she must have many of the qualities of her dead sister; courage, humour, toughness, great integrity, a splendidly and typically Parisian down-to-earth common sense. We talked together at once with ease and understanding; with her, I felt immediately at home.

She gave me a very clear and firm picture of Andrée Borrell; perhaps the most revealing remark she made was to describe her as *un garçon manqué*. She had always wished to be a boy, had liked boys' games, and had boyish interests; she was extraordinarily strong physically and of great endurance; she enjoyed all energetic pastimes, walking, cycling, climbing.

Madame Arend showed me photographs of her sister dressed in male clothing, slacks, thick sweaters, with a rucksack on her back. She said: 'Andrée never tired; I can remember when she was with me once, during the war, she picked up a rucksack stuffed with explosives and weighing a ton, and hoisted it on her back as though it was a feather. She thought nothing of carrying it out of Paris, neither

for its weight, nor for the danger it entailed. She enjoyed her work in the Resistance; she had found her *métier*.'

Found her *métier*; that seemed to me to be the key to her character. Andrée Borrell was a woman born in an unusual and heroic mould, and one that fitted her perfectly for the role circumstances called upon her to play. In that moment, I felt that perhaps her young and cruel death had not been entirely without meaning; life, savagely terminated in its twenty-fifth year, had nevertheless achieved fulfilment. Fate had given her opportunity to live as her nature craved, bravely, dangerously, vigorously. She had been accepted as one of them by men in a world of men; she had never failed them, never once, nor failed herself and, in the end, she had accepted courageously the penalty inherent in the life she had chosen. There was in that, I thought, completion; her life had not been ended barely as it had begun. She had already achieved ambition.

The brief history of her life, given me by Madame Arend, was wholly without drama; her mother had been widowed early, and had struggled hard to give her daughters a good upbringing. They were sent away to school at Louveciennes, on the outskirts of Paris, between Versailles and St. Germain, and had been very unhappy. 'Do not give that place a *réclame*,' Madame Arend exclaimed, when she saw me write down the name; 'we hated it there, it was beastly.'

Later, Andrée had worked in a shop, and celebrated her twentieth birthday a few weeks after the declaration of war in 1939. With her mother, she had then gone south, and had volunteered as a nurse; that first winter of war she had been stationed near Toulon.

After the defeat of 1940, one of the doctors in this hospital appreciating, without doubt, her qualities, asked if she would go with him to the Pyrenees, to assist men of the R.A.F. who were attempting to escape into Spain. She agreed with enthusiasm, and from that day until her arrest in 1943 she was closely concerned with the Resistance.

Early in 1942, the group with which Andrée Borrell was working in France was denounced; as revealed in her recommended award of the *Croix de Guerre*, she escaped then through Spain, and eventually reached England. With her background and experience her future path was plain before her, and she had no hesitation in putting foot on it.

When she was parachuted into France in the September of the year she had first left it, she got in touch with her sister and family. Madame Arend, who then lived in the rue Caumartin, saw her frequently;

she also met Prosper, who had often kept a rendezvous with Andrée in her flat.

Andrée had, in fact, preceded Prosper to France, and made the necessary preparations for his arrival; she had been one of the reception committee that met him when he landed.

Describing the job that lay before Prosper, Colonel Buckmaster writes: 'The whole of the Paris region was short of arms, for parachute deliveries could perforce only be made to the country areas well away from the suburbs and we found that, in most cases, once the reception committee had taken delivery, it was extremely difficult to induce them to pass on their precious weapons to any other group. This was where Prosper's force of character showed itself. His decision was final, and when he was established at the beginning of 1943, arms and ammunition began to flow to the different groups in a satisfactory manner. The greatest difficulty was thus overcome.

'Prosper, equipped with identity papers describing him as a traveller in agricultural products, spent much of his time visiting farms in the Ile de France, generally accompanied by the courier Denise, whom we had assigned to him, and whose papers made her out to be his sister. If Denise did most of the talking (for Prosper could not conceal a very slight trace of British accent) that fact caused no comment in a society where the women have generally done all the bargaining. Denise was invaluable, she shunned no risk if she thought that by taking it the business would be done more quickly and effectively. . . .

Madame Arend confirmed her sister's enthusiasm for the task she had undertaken; how she had set off from her flat to blow up a power station in a state of joyous excitement that might, in other times, have preceded a jolly outing on the river. She was without nerves.

Even after her arrest, she was indomitable. Through a well-disposed French wardress in Fresnes, she had sent messages to her sister, all of them cheerful and courageous. It had been possible also to smuggle in food to her, and clean linen; she did not, Madame Arend thinks, suffer much in Fresnes though clearly it was no picnic. Her sudden deportation to Germany in May 1944 had come as a terrible shock; they had thought she would remain in Fresnes until the war ended, and in the early summer of 1944 there were high hopes that this would not be far ahead.

From that time, they had no word of her until news came in the summer of 1946 of her death at Natzweiler; even now, her mother

will not believe this to be true, and cherishes hopes that she is alive somewhere behind the Iron Curtain.

Madame Arend not only lost her sister in the cause of French Resistance; her husband too was arrested in July 1943, and sent to a concentration camp. Happily, he survived, and Madame Arend showed me the thin suit of blue and white striped cotton he had worn as a prisoner; it still had symbols and figures stencilled on it. Such a relic is clearly a badge of honour; but I do not think I could bear to keep such a thing in my wardrobe.

The arrest of M. Arend was, of course, one of the many consequences of the break-up of the *réseau* Prosper for which he too worked. His version of the story records that on the evening of 19 July 1943, while he was out meeting his wife, Archambault (who had been arrested nearly a month earlier) turned up at his parents' house just outside Paris, where he was then living. Archambault was accompanied by three Germans in civilian clothes, driving in an open car. Archambault asked Arend's father to hand over his W/T set, but not all the parts could be found. M. Arend senior then sent for his son, and told him that he thought that the Germans concerned had been won over, probably by bribery, and were working for the Allies.

When M. Arend, junior, arrived at the house, Archambault and two of the German officers were inside; the third was outside in the car. Believing them to be secret allies, all were offered by the Arends cigarettes and drinks, and M. Arend, senior, revealed that his son was a *réfractaire*; the Germans then asked for his papers, and took them away for verification. Archambault went with them.

On his arrest, a few days later, the young M. Arend was taken to the Avenue Foch and locked up until next morning. Then he was interrogated, but nothing disagreeable happened. He was asked if he knew that Archambault was a British agent, and that Denise was in truth one Andrée Borrell; the Gestapo then said they had found quantities of false papers when Denise was arrested, and, indeed, his own false *certificat de recensement* had her signature. After a while, Archambault was brought in. The conversation was confined to the subject of the explosives that had been captured by the Germans, and nothing was said about members of the group to which Arend belonged. He was not asked about Prosper.

Subsequently, Arend was taken to the prison of Cherche Midi, where he stayed until 15 August 1943; he was not interrogated again. He was then transferred to Compiègne, which he left on 16 September

for Buchenwald. After a month there he was sent to Schoenbeck, an experience he survived, and he returned to Paris in May 1945.

He had, he said, had the impression when Archambault came to his parents' house with German officers, that he had given information about the small people in the *réseau* in order to save those who were important. . . .

That is another story; but, once again, I was moved when words that had been for me dust on paper were given reality; here, beneath my hand, was the poor covering that M. Arend had worn in Buchenwald; here was the shabby little tobacco pouch that Andrée Borrell had thrown to Dr. Boogaerts, himself a political prisoner, when she arrived at Natzweiler on the day of her murder; here was her diary for the year 1942. . . .

When she left for France in September 1942, Andrée had packed her few possessions in a suitcase and left it in care of her H.Q.; in due course, it was given to Madame Arend, and she showed me the small, personal matters it had contained. Some beads, a cheque book, a diary, a London bus ticket, a metal badge with the Cross of Lorraine, a brooch. . . . I held them carefully, as things infinitely precious; particularly the little tobacco pouch, that Dr. Boogaerts had preserved, and sent, after his own release, to Madame Arend.

She had, too, a copy of *The Natzweiler Trial*, the book that had been published by William Hodge in the War Crimes Trial series; she told me how deeply she regretted being unable to read English. Then she fetched a small box, containing a tortoiseshell-handled pen-knife and scissors; she said she had wished to send this to the publisher, as a gesture of thanks to him for having sent her the book; but she found the regulations concerning the export of presents abroad too much for her. I undertook to send it to Mr. Hodge, and did so; he was, he told me in his letter of acknowledgement, much touched that Madame Arend should have had this thought for him.

I found myself moved not only by sorrow but also by anger, when Madame Arend asked me if she might yet recover the letters Andrée had smuggled out to her from Fresnes; these had been written on cigarette paper and were, she said, precious to her.

This I could readily understand, and I asked what had happened to them. She told me that directly after the Liberation she had, of course, contacted the British authorities in the hope that something might be known about her sister. She had told them of the letters she had received from Fresnes and had been persuaded to hand them

over, 'for copying'; she agreed, only because she understood they might contain information that would be useful to the cause. She never saw them again.

This angered me deeply. There had, I thought, been too much of this sort of thing. No matter where the blame might lie, the relations of some members of the French Section, S.O.E., had been treated with callous indifference. I thought of the ring and cigarette holder that had belonged to Diana Rowden, now lying in my suitcase; of Mrs. Rowden, believing that her daughter had failed lamentably in her mission; of Tom Plewman who had, one Sunday morning in Leicestershire, read from papers I had given him news of a wife then dead for eleven years; of Mr. Clark listening while I told him the events I had uncovered that concerned Vera Leigh. . . .

Now, Madame Arend had given up letters immeasurably precious to her, in return for a formal promise they would be returned as soon as their contents had been copied; and she had never seen them again.

I could not be sanguine that I would be able to assist her, though I promised to do what I could. In the event, I did not even receive an answer to the letter I wrote to the Foreign Office asking if the letters still existed, and if so, if they might be restored to Madame Arend.

In the months that followed, more fuel was added to this fire of, I believe, righteous indignation. I met the relations of Yolande Beekman and Madeleine Damerment, I met in Madrid the mother and brother of Eliane Plewman, and not one of these had been given information that I had, without very much difficulty, obtained all those years later. If it should be said that they were left in ignorance in the belief that this was bliss, I can only reply that they all, each one, said they had craved the truth. Yolande Beekman's sister, for example, could scarcely bear to part with some papers I had shown her that gave a detailed account of her sister's last days; she asked if she might have a copy and she told me that had her mother known the whole truth, as these documents revealed it, she would have been spared much suffering. As things were, she felt it was by then too late.

Mrs. Webb, Madeleine Damerment's sister, had been no less anxious to learn what she could, nearly twelve years later, of her sister's death. It seems to me wholly incredible that these people, who had already suffered so much, should not have been given information that lay, neatly typed, on official files. None of it had any security value; the failure, I think, was one of imagination; no one, apart from Vera

Atkins, it would seem to me was interested in what had happened to those who had disappeared from the field of operations.

If the answer is that it was thought more merciful to withhold such information, I would reply that Tom Plewman himself told me he was half out of his mind in his anxiety to know the truth as to what had happened to his wife. He told me he had stormed at the officers at H.Q., shouting: 'She's my wife, damn it, if anyone should know, I should. . . .'

Had anyone been concerned for the comfort of these people, it should have been very evident that the truth, so far as it was known, was the only thing that could give them any relief from torturing anxiety. Officially, I think, no one was concerned; the war had ended and the bowler hat called. Let the dead bury the dead; our war is over. . . .

Thoughts of this kind were in my head as I held the little leather pouch that Andrée Borrell had managed to throw to Dr. Boogaerts in the ignoble concentration camp of Natzweiler; within a few hours she was to die horribly. Could anyone really hold that secrets essential to the realm would have been disclosed, if her sister had been allowed to know the circumstances of her last days on earth?

I can remember clearly the expression on Madame Arend's face as she picked up those few pathetic possessions, and put them back in a case; she might, I thought, have been granted the poor consolation of knowing all there was to be known. It was little enough, but it would, I think, have convinced her that her sister was strong and true and courageous to the end. She cannot in her heart doubt this; knowing her sister as she did. But confirmation would have given her comfort.

Before I left, Madame Arend went into another room, and came back with a brooch, made by her husband, who was a jeweller. She put it in my hand; she had talked of her boys and I had told her that I had a child; that is for your daughter, Miranda, she said. I would like her to have it.

I went away, in a mood of great sadness; there are few people born with the qualities of Andrée Borrell, and I had been greatly moved to meet her sister. It was not pleasant to know that life was, for her, not easy; no one, it seemed, cared a rap for those who had survived.

Then I got a cab and drove a great distance to the Boulevard Suchet, where John Starr owned a magnificent penthouse on top of a vast

new block of flats. I found him a gentle, charming man, and he spoke warmly of Diana; but, he told me, he had hardly known her at all; he had been arrested a few weeks after she arrived in France. What he had known of her, he had liked and admired; but, he emphasized, it was very little.

From a drawer in his desk he produced the book I have quoted before—the book by the Abbé Guillaume; I had been told about this, but had been unable to secure a copy. Generously, John Starr agreed to lend me his; I clutched it to me as he drove me away to the Porte d'Auteuil, where I found another taxi. It was, at that moment, as precious to me as gold.

A few hours later I lay in a *wagon-lit* in the Night Ferry and, I confess, using the blade of the penknife Madame Arend had bought for William Hodge, I cut the pages. . . . John Starr had not himself read it.

I read until 3 a.m. while the train roared over the open country of Northern France, with my eyes popping out of my head. The Foreign Office might consider the personal record of a woman courier in S.O.E. a State secret of some magnitude, but the French, it was clear, thought otherwise. As the train shrieked and swayed in its flight to the coast I read page after page about the *réseau* Prosper; names, places, dates and events, all were set down in staggering detail. I was particularly fascinated by what the Abbé had to say about Gilbert Dericourt—a character mentioned in Bleicher's book; and by the revelation that he had consulted *Les Mémoires d'une Chatte*, the diary of Madame Carré, written during her stay in England. This consisted of 175 typewritten pages, and fitted in, broadly speaking, with the evidence given by Bleicher as a prisoner of war—except that she minimized her own role in the Abwehr in order to clear herself with the English. . . .

Madame Carré was condemned to death in February 1949, but the sentence was commuted; I had heard, in Paris, that she had recently been released.

Well, I said to myself, well; I was so excited I rang for the attendant and asked for a bottle of Vichy water with which to calm myself. If the Abbé could read the document prepared by La Chatte in order to exculpate herself with our authorities, it seemed *very* unreasonable that I might not be given a few, simple facts about Diana Rowden.

CHAPTER XXIV

AS SOON AS I got back to England, I was able to send out a sheaf of letters to people whose names and addresses I had learnt during my researches in France. The most important were to Mrs. Farmiloe, the sister of Yolande Beekman, whose address had been given me by Mademoiselle Gobeaux, and to the Reverend Mother of the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Hitchin who had, so I had been told, befriended Madeleine Damerment during her time in England. I also wrote to a number of people who had, at one time or another, been connected with S.O.E. in London; this batch bore little fruit.

Mrs. Farmiloe, however, got in touch with me at once; and early in October I had tea with her and her mother, in her Kensington flat.

They were a charming couple; and quickly assured me that they were glad I proposed to write the story of Yolande. By this time, my extreme diffidence and doubt in the task of contacting relations had diminished a little; the reception Tom Plewman, Mrs. Rowden and Mr. Clark had given me had, to a large extent, satisfied me that the next of kin of those murdered women had no doubts that their story was one that the world should know. But first contact was to remain always painful; I never wholly divested myself of a sense of unpardonable intrusion.

Mrs. Farmiloe and her mother, Madame Unternährer,¹ were exceptionally kind to me; we had tea and talked, and they re-created for me the image of a gentle, diffident and self-effacing character; in a sense, the picture they painted of Yolande Beekman was the picture I would have drawn of Diana Rowden, from my knowledge of her; a picture that her mother destroyed, replacing it with a character infinitely more complex; Mrs. Rowden used vivid, masterful strokes, whereas I would have used the delicate line of the engraver. . . .

The story of Yolande Beekman's brief life could hardly have been more unexceptional; a quiet, happy childhood in Paris, in London; school and undemanding friendships formed in the leafy pastures of Hampstead Heath; an interest in designing, in illustration, in those things that were devised for children. Then, the war, the W.A.A.F., and the decision to go to France; for this there seemed no reason and no logical link. Nothing in Yolande Beekman's life, as her mother and sister knew it, could have led, reasonably, to such a decision; they did not know how she came to make it, nor whom it was who

¹ Died in the autumn of 1956.

had introduced her to S.O.E. Nor have I been able to discover this; possibly it was her French background and perfect knowledge of the French tongue, that led her, in the end, to her death in Dachau, and that alone. For it was a routine matter that regular units should, from time to time, be asked to submit names of those who had specialist knowledge of this nature. It may have been that Yolande came to S.O.E. through such a direct channel.

The means are immaterial; it is the end that is astonishing. Yolande, as her mother and sister described her to me, would seem to have been the last person in the world to have been drawn to the work of an agent in Occupied France, perhaps one of the last in the world to have appeared suitable. . . . Yet she was drawn and she was eminently and perfectly equipped for the task.

I think, when the time came near for resolution to be put to the test, Yolande may have been touched by doubt; her mother told me she had—and surely nothing could have been more natural—done her best to dissuade her from her purpose. As she talked of this, I thought that her arguments might have struck some chord, some streak of self-doubt in her daughter. But though argument might have moved Yolande, it never deflected her for an instant from her purpose. Madame Unternährer found this incomprehensible; she could see no reason why Yolande should launch herself on such a dangerous sea, and every reason why she should not. I sensed that the long, agonized discussions she had had with Yolande had been singularly barren; Yolande could not explain why she had made this perilous decision; she could only repeat time and again that it was made, and that she must stand by it.

It struck me, then, that there was, perhaps, in all gentle people, a core of steel. That which is on the surface tough, may have a façade that cracks as easily as plaster, revealing under stress a heart that is soft as a spoiled fruit. But gentleness and simple purpose can cover only those whose inner integrity is inviolable; they are the outward symbols of strength and not of frailty.

I thought this because the picture of Yolande Beekman was so like that of Diana Rowden, as she was in youth, of Noor Inayat Khan, of Madeleine Damerment, as I came later to know her. It could not, I thought, be coincidence that so many of these women had been formed in a diffident mould. I came to realize that gentleness was a hallmark of the courageous; the rule and not the exception.

After tea Mrs. Farmiloe showed me a picture of her sister; pretty,

full-faced, tranquil. In the corner, there was a narrow strip of the ribbon worn with the *Croix de Guerre*; Mrs. Farmiloe explained that they had never received Yolande's decoration, though they had been told it had been awarded. They imagined it must have been sent to the husband whom Yolande had married shortly before she left for France, and with whom they had now lost contact.

Mrs. Farmiloe asked me, and this touched me very much, if I thought it right that the ribbon should be thus placed in the frame with the photograph, and I replied I thought it entirely right.

We talked a little longer, and Madame Unternährer said something that was to me more poignant, more sad, than anything I was to hear during the whole of my quest. She was talking about her daughter's imprisonment and the hardships she must have endured; she spoke of that last night she spent in Dachau, where she had been taken for execution, and had arrived late in the evening after a long, dreary railway journey.

'There was no one there to look after Yolande,' she said. 'No one to give her food, or a warm drink, or any comfort. She arrived alone, cold I expect, and hungry, and there was no hand to help her. When she was in the W.A.A.F., and came back late at night, and tired, I was always there to give her a warm drink, Ovaltine, or something like that, but at Dachau there was nothing. . . .'

This I, an outsider, found almost unbearable; it brought death and suffering and grief down from the austere pinnacles of noble sacrifice and placed them by the kitchen fire, in the familiar setting of the wooden table, the saucepan, the milk jug and the spoon.

The onlooker could see the heroic dead carved gloriously in stone, garlanded with laurels; but to the mother, the sister, the husband, they were warm, remembered flesh, that had been comforted with Ovaltine and tucked up in a cosy bed; and the ultimate anguish lay not in the harsh brutality of death, but in the loneliness, the cold and hunger that had preceded it.

Knowledge of death became, in time, supportable; what could never be endured without torment was the picture of a tired, chill, frightened girl being shut, alone, in an icy cell. A mug of milky drink became a symbol of all that we know of love and service and protection; without it there was nothing, nothing. . . .

I wrote, after that meeting, several times to Mrs. Farmiloe; and I sent at her request a copy of the facts I had been able to discover about Yolande's imprisonment and death. I sent this with some anxiety; I

feared it might give much pain and serve no purpose. But, quick and generous came Mrs. Farmiloe's reply. She said, 'Please do not have any misgiving about it. I read it with the greatest interest. . . . I am sure our dear Yolande would want us to know every detail of her last months of life. I feel that had my mother been able to read this document, it would have answered a great many questions that she vaguely wanted to ask. Now it is too late. . . .'

She went on, 'We have had a letter from Mrs. Rowden, who seemed so very pleased to have received her daughter's *Croix de Guerre*, after nine years! She says it is entirely due to your researches that this has come about. . . .'

When I read this news I was delighted; and I come now to one of the most astonishing episodes of an astonishing story.

Earlier in the year, I had come across a copy of a document that led me to suppose that Diana Rowden had, like Noor Inayat Khan, Yolande Beekman and Eliane Plewman, been awarded a posthumous *Croix de Guerre*. It was a copy of her citation, and it was in the precise form and made on the same date as the citations of the women who had received the Cross. I was, in fact, sure that Diana too had been thus decorated; but I said nothing about it to Mrs. Rowden for fear I was mistaken. I knew it would mean a great deal to her if Diana had received this recognition of her services, and I did not want to say anything until I was certain.

I therefore asked the F.A.N.Y. if they would approach the Military Attaché at the French Embassy in London, and inquire if Diana had been awarded a *Croix de Guerre*; I told them I was perfectly willing to do this myself, but felt it very much better that the inquiry should come from them.

The F.A.N.Y. thought so too; and took action. This had been two or three months earlier. In due course, the Embassy replied that Diana Rowden had indeed been awarded a *Croix de Guerre*, and could not understand why it had not been given to her next of kin. If given the correct name and address, one would be sent immediately. . . .

So, in October 1955, Mrs. Rowden got the decoration awarded to her daughter in January 1946; and a little later I got a letter from her which told me how great her pride and pleasure had been.

This episode had repercussions; the story got about the village in which Mrs. Rowden lived, it was picked up by the local paper, which sent a reporter, and from his published column the story was picked

up by the London *Star*. In the Starman's Diary of 26 November 1955, the story of Diana was told—and, with reference to the decoration, it said: 'Through a confusion in the records it was not until this week that Mrs. Rowden learned of the award of the *Croix de Guerre* to her daughter in 1946.'

When I read this, I reflected that confusion in the records was one way of describing a pretty complete nonsense; but, as it happened, I was wrong. It *was* due to a confusion, but not in the sense that I, at that time, or the *Star*, believed.

Dame Irene Ward, who has always been a staunch ally, decided not to let the matter rest there; she inquired of the Minister of State for Air (Diana had served in the W.A.A.F. before being seconded to S.O.E.) what explanation there might be of this seemingly remarkable lapse.

The answer, when it came, I found completely shattering. In 1942, it was said, the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals in Time of War, recommended that posthumous awards conferred on British service personnel by foreign governments should not be accepted. The reason given was that some foreign governments issued posthumous awards much more freely than did the British Government, and if we had accepted posthumous awards made by foreign governments, we should have been unable to reciprocate. . . .

I found it startling in the extreme that the British Government should, apparently, reduce the award of decorations to those who had died bravely to the level of the ancient social custom of tossing back the cutlet.

'We can't offer you a meal, so we can't accept one from you. . . .'

This, in itself, seems shabby and ungracious; but if it was indeed the prescribed procedure, authority might have followed it impartially; or, shall we say, have taken care to ensure that it was carried out efficiently. But this was not so.

Dame Irene was further informed that we (the British) returned to the French Government all citations and insignia which we had been asked to send to the next of kin of R.A.F. and W.A.A.F. officers whose death had been presumed. The *Croix de Guerre* for Section Officer Rowden was amongst those returned.

At the same time, said authority blandly, we did not tell the next of kin of these awards proposed by the French Government and that they had been declined. It was considered that such a letter would cause unnecessary pain to the recipient. . . .

One can only resort to an old cliché to describe the emotions provoked by this communication—the imagination *boggled*. . . . If the British Government in its wisdom felt it less offensive to send back, coldly, decorations that the French wished to bestow on British subjects, than to accept them in a proper spirit of appreciation, explaining at the same time that we conferred posthumously only the Victoria Cross and the George Cross, the supreme awards for valour, that was its affair. But to deny to the next of kin knowledge that these awards had been offered is utterly incomprehensible. Is it less painful to know that a decoration for valour has been offered, and refused, than it is to believe that heroic services have gone unnoticed and unsung?

And why, in God's name, if Diana's Cross was sent back surlily to the French, were Eliane Plewman's and Yolande Beekman's conferred? Eliane Plewman, it was true, was not a member of the regular forces of the Crown before she joined S.O.E.; her Cross might have slipped through unnoticed; but Yolande Beekman was, like Diana, a W.A.A.F. Yet her family were informed about her *Croix de Guerre*, and Mrs. Rowden was not. . . .

The only satisfaction to be got from this miserable, squalid affair is that Mrs. Rowden *did* get it in the end and I dare say no one will now try to take it from her.

I remembered at this time the letter Mrs. Rowden had sent me in reply to my first approach. She said then without bitterness but with, I thought, a measure of sadness, that whereas some of the women who had shared danger with Diana had got the *Croix de Guerre*, Diana had got nothing. . . . This made *me* feel extremely bitter; if authority had only been efficient in its embargo, all or none, less damage would have been done.

Still, there it was; and that autumn I thought I had merely been the instrument whereby a foolish oversight had been made good. I did not know that I had, in fact, been the means of securing for Mrs. Rowden a decoration which had been officially, and unknown to her, rejected on her behalf.

I was extremely delighted then; and I am today unrepentant.

This was, altogether, a fruitful time. When I got back from France I found a letter waiting for me from Major Browne-Bartroli, D.S.O., late agent of French Section, S.O.E., alias Tiburce, alias Toto, alias Ditcher. . . . He replied to the letter I had sent his mother, in Madrid, and I was very glad to gain contact with him. Tom Plewman had told me Eliane had had a brother Albert, who had also been an S.O.E.

officer, but he had not known his address; so I had no course but to write to Madame Browne-Bartoli. Now Albert wrote to me, from Madrid, and a very agreeable letter it was too. His wife, he said, would be able to give me all the details I might need, as she had always been in contact with his sister, and had been lucky enough to escape just before the Gestapo arrested her; later she managed to get the man who denounced Eliane's circuit arrested and shot.

He added that he was entirely at my disposal in my desire to write the story of his sister. . . .

It was my intention to travel to Gibraltar in November, and it was, therefore, convenient for me to stop a day or two in Madrid to see Major Browne-Bartoli; the B.E.A. London-Gibraltar flight involved a call there. This, then, I arranged.

My search for Madeleine Damerment also progressed favourably; towards the end of October I got a reply to the letter I had sent to the Sacred Heart Convent at Hitchin. The Reverend Mother Superior told me that she had not herself been at Hitchin when Madeleine Damerment stayed there, but that her predecessor would be pleased to correspond with me on the matter. She then gave me the name of Reverend Mother Eleanor, and her address, in Canada.

That she should now be so far away was a disappointment; but I at once sat down and wrote her a letter, explaining fully my purpose. No reply had come before I left for Madrid; but I felt sure that I would, in time, receive one.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN MADRID, IT was cold and wet. At 5 p.m. on the day of my arrival, I met Albert Browne-Bartoli and his wife in the Hotel Plaza, and we went up to the bar at the very top of the great tower to talk.

I warmed at once to Albert; his was a most endearing character and wholly unexpected. It was not easy to see him in his role of leader of the Cluny maquis; yet his record, I knew, was one of immense achievement and courage. I should by then have become accustomed to heroes who appeared in sober clothing, but somehow familiarity never bred expectation. Always it was a shock to meet reality; in imagination one

saw the man of action, the tough type with the tommy-gun and the grenade. The small, spare man in the dark suit came, always, as a surprise.

Albert told me he had been dropped with Robert Benoist, the famous racing driver, who had been arrested shortly after and, in due course, put to infamous death in Buchenwald. Albert was sure that their reception had been phoney, or, put more bluntly, German-controlled. He had fortunately been able to acquire a bicycle, and had pedalled away into the night, shaking off a somewhat sinister character who had wished to accompany him. He had, in fact, cut adrift from those with whom he should have made first, direct, contact, and found his own way to his appointed field. To this he owed his life; and he believed that Benoist had been less fortunate and had, from the time he landed in France, been a marked and therefore doomed man.

Of Eliane, he traced the story that Tom Plewman had told me, filling in various gaps. He and his wife reinforced the impression I had already received of her, of a woman enormously vital, brilliant, gay . . . later, I was to meet some of the people who had been her friends in Madrid, and each one of them spoke of her in these terms. 'If Eliane came into the room now,' one of them said, 'it would be as if a searchlight had been turned on; she illuminated everything. . . .'

Albert had met her once, in the field, in Marseilles. She had—this I discovered much later, from a reliable source—landed twenty miles from the point where she was expected, and she had been obliged to hide for two months, having no means of gaining contact with her chiefs. She had carried with her a million francs; this was parachuted separately, and she never saw it again. . . .

This I had not heard when I met Albert, but he did say some pungent things about her departure from England and the staff work involved. When he had met her in Marseilles he had been appalled to discover that she was about to embark alone on a hazardous sabotage enterprise, involving the carriage by tram of a heavy load of explosive. He had taken over himself, and did the job with her. . . . He felt, or so I believed, that impossible demands had been made of Eliane; that she had been placed in a damnable position.

His wife, however, knew more of that phase, for she had been in constant touch with Eliane, and had given her what help she could. And she knew she had been betrayed.

The story of this betrayal is, inevitably, inchoate, and has its roots in sordid venality. The betrayer, it seemed, was one Alberte, who lived

with two men, one of whom worked for the Gestapo, and the other for the *réseau* to which Eliane belonged. She was, thus, in a position to betray, and she did so; when the war was over, Madame Browne-Bartoli, and the late Jean Hellet, a close friend, made it their business to find this woman and her treacherous lover. It took them a long, long time, but in the end they triumphed; and the traitor received justice before a firing squad.

As was nearly always the case, Eliane sensed treachery before any tangible manifestation of it became apparent; but she refused to leave her post. 'She had an enormous sense of duty,' her sister-in-law said, 'and always volunteered for the most dangerous work. She was in a difficult position, for the men she worked with spoke French with English accents.'

This meant Eliane did much that they should, had they been equipped, have done; and she felt that no matter what the danger, she must stay with them. 'I remember,' Madame Albert said, 'the last time we met, on the stair leading to my apartment. I said to her "*au revoir*" for I had decided that, for the sake of my small daughter, the time had come when I must seek refuge elsewhere; and Eliane replied, "No, not *au revoir—adieu*". She knew we would never meet again, on this earth. But she was dry eyed; she never cried, though I did.'

Madame Albert got out just in time. She took a tram, then a train, and then just walked; anything to get away from Marseilles and that condemned flat. Eliane stayed; and, shortly after, made her last rendezvous with the infamous Alberte. German officers, disguised as gas men, waited for her in the flat; and when Eliane came, they took her.

She spent twenty-one days in the prison of Les Baumettes, and during that time she pretended to be the mistress of her chief, a simple woman who knew nothing of his work nor of his connections with the Resistance. Schemes were made to rescue her; but before anything could be done she was sent to Fresnes. That was the story.

I left Madrid with my impression of Eliane Plewman more deeply engraved, but in no sense altered. Her personality had been one of unusual brilliance; I could believe that her death had left a darkness that could never wholly be relieved. Madame Albert told me that, for years, neither she nor her husband could bear even to mention her name, so acute was their sense of loss; nor could they bear to look at her photograph.

'It was as though the sun had been obliterated; one could not believe it possible to live without it. . . .'

Another thought came to me as I flew south to Gibraltar; that each one of these women had been greatly loved. They had not chosen the course they did because the world was cold to them, and lonely; they had been prepared to give because to them much had been given. They had not come face to face with death empty handed; they had had great treasure to relinquish.

This belief received fresh confirmation when I got home and found a registered air mail packet with a Canadian post mark. I opened it anxiously; and saw for the first time the face of Madeleine Damerment.

She looked unbelievably young—she was in fact twenty-six when she died, and the photograph had been taken shortly before she left England on her last journey—and, more than young, innocent. The face might have been that of a vivacious, pert little French girl in her early teens; enormously alive and sparkling, round cheeked, dark eyed, with perfect white teeth and a generous mouth. . . . Above all, *French*; there was something in that face that could have been bred only in France, and, staring at the small, yellow print, I could hear, so clearly, the sort of voice she would have had, and the sort of things it would have said. I had seen hundreds of Madeleine Damerments skipping on and off buses and trains, chattering in cafés, giggling in the Bois on a hot Sunday afternoon, walking, hands crossed, face set momentarily in sober pattern, to Mass on a Sunday morning. . . . Well, there she was, at last: Madeleine Damerment, the last of 'my' women. I did not know then that I would, four months later, trace a seventh—the unknown woman of Natzweiler—and look, too, on the pattern of her face.

Reverend Mother wrote to me: 'Thank you very much for your letter and also for the project of your great work of dedicating a memorial to our fine heroines of the last war. I am sorry I am not in England any more, I would have loved to see you and talk to you at length of our darling Madeleine, whom I knew so well during the year before she died. I will try to tell you all I know of her, and with the help of the enclosures you may be able to trace other persons connected with her.

'Madeleine Damerment (Martine Dussautoy as she was known in England in the war) was the daughter of M. Damerment, the post-master general of Lille, Nord, France, who himself was a prisoner of the Germans and died in the salt mines, somewhere in Germany. Her mother was also a prisoner, but never went to Germany. She was saved by the advancing Allies when they landed in France. I could not tell

you whether she is still alive; she has not written to me since I came here three years ago.

'Madeleine had two other sisters, one of whom married an English boy and after the war came to live somewhere in the south-west of London. I don't remember having ever met her, but you may be able to trace some of her relations in Lille.

'I could not tell you how far she had gone in her studies, she was still so young when the war began. During the first two years of the war under the Occupation she entered in the Underground Movement, and was assigned the difficult task of saving Allied pilots who were brought down in France. I never questioned her very much about her former work but I knew she had succeeded in passing to safety across the line of Occupied France into the Unoccupied south seventy-five British pilots.

'There came a day when she herself was in danger, so she made her escape through Spain where she was kept a prisoner in Miranda concentration camp by the Spanish. She never liked to talk about this, but I know she suffered a lot and was at last set free through the mediation of the British Consulate in Madrid, which was also responsible for her transport to England.

'She was in a bad state when she arrived, but she was kindly looked after by the British Medical Corps, and she was soon her cheerful self again. She was sent to Raycott, near Oxford, in a family there, but I have completely forgotten the name of the persons with whom she stayed, although she spoke about them and loved them dearly.

'Then she got to know quite a number of the Free French and through them she came to Hitchin Convent, where there was always an open house for them. After a while, she felt very well again and able to resume some more work. She was sent to Scotland to train as a parachutist, then to London for her secret work, and one day she told me she was ready to go back. One night she phoned me from London, a few minutes before midnight, and said "The car is at the door, Reverend Mother, in ten minutes I shall be gone. Goodbye, and pray for me."

'I never heard of her again until I received the enclosed telegram telling me of her death, followed by the letter I am also enclosing. After the war I received a few letters from another fellow prisoner, which I am also enclosing. They may interest you, as they have been a great consolation to me. I am also sending her photo; it is her true picture, she could not be more natural. It was sent to me by her mother who had

enlarged one of the Kodak snaps I sent to her after the war. When you have finished with these little souvenirs, will you be kind enough to send them back to me, to whom they mean a lot, to keep with the souvenirs of those brave boys and girls which I knew and loved so much during those glorious days in England.

'One day, I hope you will be kind enough to send me a copy of your published book, and I shall thus be able to unite the names of her fellow heroines with the memory of her I cherish so much.

'Kindly excuse my English—I am pure French, born and bred, and since I came here I have lost touch with English-speaking people. I wish you every success with your book, and thank you for bringing this memory to life again. . . .'

Goodbye, and pray for me . . . within a few hours of speaking those words, Madeleine Damerment had dropped to a German reception committee and had, for the last time, known what it was to move in freedom. I wondered, remembering the words of Eliane Plewman, 'Not *au revoir*—*adieu*', if Madeleine too had used the word *adieu*, when taking leave of Reverend Mother Eleanor.

The waste, the waste, the waste of it all. The others had, at least, had a run for their money, but Madeleine had been arrested as she landed on French soil, had been dropped to a reception committee arranged, so London thought, by a man who had in fact been arrested four months before. His radio had gone on tap tap tapping false information to London, and never had London suspected; or, so I hoped, had been the case. The only alternative was that London had known, and had fed Madeleine and her two companions as innocent sacrifice to the Germans, flesh and blood, muscle and sinew, to keep the lions happy, to persuade them that London had not rumbled their little game. . . .

I read the letter that had followed the casualty telegram; I knew it well, for I had by then read it five times. The same letter, with names and dates altered, had gone to the next of kin of all the other women; this, of course, was inevitable office routine. The same type of casualty, the same letter . . . and yet, I found it chilling. The same phrases of regret and consolation, glibly repeated over and over again, lost their meaning and became meretricious. Would it not have been possible, when dealing with such very special women, who had died in such very special circumstances, to have written each letter individually?

Then I read the letters from a 'fellow prisoner' in Karlsruhe; here they are:

'Dear Lady,

'I beg your pardon that I take the liberty to write to you. A short time after the war I have written you but I do not know whether you got my letters, therefore I do so once more now. I got your address by your daughter Martine (I do not know another name, I am sorry to say).

'I got to know Martine in the prison of Karlsruhe. We were together in one confinement. Someone had informed the Gestapo. When I came into the prison on the 15.6.44, Martine had been in Karlsruhe, where she was brought from Paris. Besides her six other English ladies were there. Soon Martine has been to me like a sister, learnt, know and love her as a precious lady. She was able to speak about all and she was very religious. When the bombs fell and we were confined in our small room, she had in her hands the rosary and prayed. How she was longing for a visit at the mass and for the participation at the communion! But she was never allowed to do so.

'She was very clever at every work, too. We had to glue little coloured points on little hairslings. Once she made a heart with a crown of thorns from these coloured points. It should be for the convent church at Hitchin.

'How much told me Martine about her dear parents. She said about you, dearest Lady, that you are countess and from France. I heard, that Martine's father does not live any more. I take the liberty, dearest Lady, to express hearty condolation. I know by Martine, which great loss it is for you. Martine told me nothing but what was favourable of her dear parents, of her two sisters Jeanin and Charlin and her nephew Philipp. She also told me of Raycott and Hitchin; all that I would see once. She allowed me to participate in her whole life.

'In spite of having been imprisoned Martine never was dejected; she always was courageous and trusting in God. She sang much, though it was forbidden too. Often we were very glad. Once Martine said: "One must embellish the life oneself." That is a true word. In the prison Martine was suffering from bad anaemic but she got stouter and stouter. She got no medicine.

'I massaged her every evening. We often laughed when I was doing so. She also made gymnastic every day.

'I am nurse, twenty-nine years old; as I am a little affected in my lungs, I got extra food. I got $\frac{1}{4}$ pound of butter, and $\frac{1}{2}$ of sausage a week and $\frac{1}{2}$ L of milk daily. All these things I divided in our confinement. Martine saved her daily bread very much—often it was mouldy.

—and gave it our menu. That always was a little festivity for us! Our usual food often was very unclean. The portion were small too.

'I got rid of by the Gestapo on the 8.9.44. Martine was fetched on the 12.9.44, I do not know where. Her way may have been not too difficult for her! I surely know that she never was discouraged, she always took her life from her God, thinking of her England and her dear family. I learnt very much by Martine and I will always be thankful my fate that I learnt to know such people, who always are in good spirits though the life is very difficult.

'Dear Lady, I hope to have given you a little joy and to have consoled you. Would you be so kind to write me, if you know something from Martine! I should be very glad of it.

'Yours respectfully,'

'Dear Mother Superior,

'I beg your pardon, when I write faulty. I don't good speak and write English but I learn. I thank you very much for your letter, it gave me much pleasure, but at the same time a great pain, over the death of our poor Martine-Madeleine. I have loved she was me a sister, who me gave phisical and soul much for my further live. She know, that she must die perhaps, she must give her signature voluntary to her sentence for death at the Gestapo in Paris. But she yet had the hope to see her England, her family and you dear Mother Superior. She did tell how much me of Raycott and Hitchin. She did tell me how much love and veneration of you. In her thought was Martine-Madeleine often by you and her dear mother. I be in mourning for Martine's mother, it is terrible to lose the husband and the daughter on this manner. She tell me from her cousin, whose Dominikanerin is in a Leprahospital, or from the work of a sister by the mission. I believe she had the wish, when she do not married, herself to put in the service the mission. God would it otherwise.

'How anxious may Martine-Madeleine her death hour have expect. She die but with God, for her England and her family, always she was unite with God. Often I admire her deep religious.

'I also know the two other English girls, who with her die, it was brave mans. England can be proud of such brave mans.

'I should be once with her in Raycott and Hitchin; we paint us out how beautiful this will be. She now death, but in me live she wider, and her soul is now than lighter angel by God and the mans who she loved, this I believe.

'I should be very happy, when I could come to England. I will be diligent for every work—but my wish perhaps, only a dream.

'I have written after the war many letters for you, dear Mother Superior, but I don't know if you had get my letters? By the Censorship of my letter for you, I have become acquaintance with an officer of the war office of the British Army of the Rhine. The officer did communicate me the death of our poor Martine-Madeleine and the others English girls.

'How you see out my last letter, I am a sister-nurse, thirty years old, was three months 1944 political from Gestapo in the prison Karlsruhe. I had joke at Hitler and Goebbels on the street, a woman heard this and announce it the Gestapo. So I learnt know Martine-Madeleine. I schall do she never forget.

'I would not show the letter my teacher for English language. I can write personal with you. I am sorry for my mistake. I beg you give me a little friendship to me, in memory of our poor, dear Martine-Madeleine.

'With all good wishes for you and many thanks,

'respectfully,'

Clearly, this good lady—who, in the following spring, I was to meet in Germany—was in some confusion as to whom she was addressing. The first letter, sent to the Convent at Hitchin, was, nevertheless, thought to be addressed to Madeleine's mother. This misunderstanding was cleared up by Reverend Mother's reply, and the second is addressed properly to her.

I shall call this German woman Fraulein X, for while she consented to see me, and told me everything she could about Madeleine and her time in prison, she begged me not to reveal her name. She fears that the hour when it would be dangerous to be known an anti-Nazi may strike again; possibly soon.

Her letters, I thought, told me everything there was to be known about Madeleine; I was as far as ever from contacting her relations, but suddenly that seemed unimportant. The two letters, written on cheap paper in a childish hand, told me all that mattered. It was all there, the faith, the courage and the conviction, the gaiety, the endurance and the strength. The details that might fill in the wider picture lost significance.

It was these letters, too, that gave me the idea of writing to Karlsruhe prison and asking if the records revealed the name of a fourth

woman who had arrived there on 12 May 1944, and left on 6 July of the same year. Karlsruhe, I knew, was an established German civil prison, run by the competent Prison Commissioners and, unlike the concentration camps, certainly kept proper records. Knowing the German passion for doing things in good order, with chits, forms and records correctly filled in—a friend once remarked that a German would knock a man down, kick out his gold teeth and insist on giving him a receipt before thrusting him into a gas oven—I thought it very likely that the Karlsruhe records had been preserved, and I saw no reason why I should not be given an extract from them. So I wrote.

On 22 December I got an answer. As I had guessed, the records existed, and the letter I received was most civil. It gave me the names of six women, 'my' six, either correctly or in the form of the aliases they had, for security reasons, assumed (Madeleine was given as Dussautoy), but no other British name could be traced.

It did not, then, strike me that all these women, though some of them were French, might be considered 'British' in that they were known to be agents sent from Britain; so I did not think to ask for the names of any non-British subjects who might have come to Karlsruhe and left on the same day. I did not know that entries were classified under nationality, and that the name I sought might be entered elsewhere. I did not discover that for another four months.

This exchange with Karlsruhe reawakened my urge to discover who the missing seventh might be; I had the temerity to approach an acquaintance, wife of a Cabinet Minister, to seek her assistance in gaining access even to a restricted portion of the archives. She did, I know, her very best, and I was and am, deeply grateful to her. But the answer was not only could no access be given, but no reason could be given for this either; there was one, but it was too secret to be revealed. She added that her husband was himself rather puzzled....

Well, that was that, and as the year dipped down to December I let these affairs slip a little from my mind. One discovery I did make though at this season; I read the newly published book by my friend, Bill Simpson, *I Burned My Fingers*, and from it I learnt that Bill himself (between the endless operations he endured to repair, so far as was possible, the burns and injuries he suffered when shot down over France in May 1940) had been employed by French Section, S.O.E.

I wrote to him at once, remonstrating, mildly, at what I conceived to be a misplaced levity in his title, and asking at the same time if he had known any of 'my' women; to my delight, he replied, 'I had

no idea you were a friend of Diana Rowden. I met her during the war, and she asked me to put her in touch with some of my friends in S.O.E. I did this, but in the meantime I met her mother in a small flat they shared in London. She was a girl of striking character of whom I was very fond, though not in any way other than friendship. I wonder if I did right in recommending her to my pals?

'I wish you the best of luck with your book on the S.O.E. girls. They certainly were a wonderful crowd. . . .'

I telephoned Bill asking him to dinner; but he was, by then, away on his summer holiday. The date was 7 December. Then I was abroad, then Bill was abroad, then I was abroad, and so it went on. It was not till April that I finally pinned him down.

Mrs. Rowden had told me she did not know who had introduced Diana to S.O.E., and had wondered who it could have been; I thought I should give her this bit of news, and did so. In her reply she said, 'Tell your friend not to reproach himself. If it had not been him, it would have been someone else. Diana was determined to get back to France, and would have found a way somehow. He need not wonder if he did right—it was inevitable.'

Lastly, before the year ended, I got a letter from Irene Ward. Her history of the F.A.N.Y. had just been published, and her chapters on those who had worked for S.O.E., either in the field or in England, were given much publicity. She received a number of letters, and amongst them one from a friend of Lilian Rolfe, who had also lost her life in Germany.

It was a long letter, describing in great detail all the efforts that had been made to trace Miss Rolfe after the war, the anguish of the months and years of uncertainty. . . . At the end, the writer said: 'I'm so thankful that you have written this book, for I fear people are apt to forget those that saved us and died for us. I'm so thankful that all names have been given for people to read. . . . Thank you for what you have done.'

I found this comforting; it was further evidence that those who had been closely linked with the women who had died were glad that their stories should be known. It was not they who had wanted silence, and it was not they who believed that to be told nothing was kindness. The truth was what they craved, no matter how dreadful; I felt I had, in 1955, uncovered some layers of prevarication, swaddling and red tape, and approached, if only remotely, the truth.

I knew something about each one of the six, of some, a great deal.

I knew where they had lived, and what they had done, I knew where they had worked in France, and I knew the manner of their arrest. I knew, too, that each one, except Eliane Plewman alone, had worked for a *réseau* penetrated by the Germans, or in contact with a *réseau* that had been thus penetrated. I had, rightly or wrongly, reached the conviction that special treatment was given them for this reason; they knew too much. I remembered what Jean Overton Fuller had written in *The Starr Affair* about John Starr; she had reported that the French officer who had investigated a charge made against him of intelligence with the enemy, and had found there was no case, had said: 'Poor Starr! He knows too much. It is his tragedy.'

I thought it had, perhaps, been the tragedy of these women too; they also had known too much. The Germans were determined that they should not be liberated, alive.

CHAPTER XXVI

FOR A MONTH, while London lay powerless in the iron hand of winter, my quest lay frozen, too; momentarily, it seemed to reach a standstill, and my mind, as if frozen with the window-panes of my house, was unable to think of fresh channels down which I might probe. I went, then, to Madeira, and the sun must have oiled the passages of my brain, for as soon as I got back, I cursed myself for a fool. Reverend Mother Eleanor had told me that Madeleine's father had been a postmaster in Lille; surely, then, the postal officials of that town would know something of him, and, very probably, be able to put me in touch with relations.

So I wrote to the Regional Director of the P.T.T. in Lille explaining my purpose, and asking if he could put me in touch with any relatives of the late Monsieur Damerment. Before his answer came, the sister of Madeleine had telephoned me from Heston. That was the last link forged in my original chain. . . .

The good Director had forwarded my letter to Madame Damerment, who had in turn forwarded it to her daughter, suggesting she should get in touch with me. This she did at once and I arranged to go and see her the following week.

Just before these events, I had made attempts to discover where

Raycott was and who were the people with whom Madeleine had found rest and shelter during the first months of her stay in England, following the deprivations of imprisonment in Miranda. To this end I enlisted the help of the editor of the *Oxford Mail* (for I knew this 'Raycott' was near Oxford), who was indeed most kind and resourceful. His chief reporter tried to trace the family concerned, but without success. There is, unfortunately, no Raycott that can be discovered in any gazetteer anywhere near Oxford; perhaps Draycot was meant. . . . But both the Reverend Mother and Fraulein X referred to Raycott; this is a matter I have been unable to unravel in any way.

I made, too, a further attempt to get in touch with some of the people Eliane Plewman had worked with in Marseilles. I had discovered the name and address of the *liquidateur* of her *réseau*, a man living in Aix-en-Provence, and wrote a letter. To this I did not receive a reply.

On 2 March, I took the Underground to Hounslow West, and then a bus, and so came to the house where Mrs. Webb, the sister of Madeleine, lived. I found her entirely delightful; and of all the people I met in connection with this book who had in one way or another been related to the women that were its theme, she was the most informative. For she had herself spent the war in France and had therefore been closely connected with the work done by her parents and sister in the Resistance movement. She knew, in fact, all that Madeleine had done before she had been forced to fly from Occupied territory in 1941.

We settled in the sitting-room of her pleasant house to talk and I was glad to learn that her own story was, in the end, a happy one. She survived the perils of the Occupation, and, after the war, married a young British soldier who had been billeted on her family in 1940 and who had, after the Liberation, come back to see how the Damerments had fared. . . . Now she has two charming children and radiates a warm, cheerful serenity. She is, I fancy, very much like her dearly-loved sister, Madeleine.

As we talked, I was, yet again, conscious of the extraordinary events through which ordinary, domesticated women had lived. Mrs. Webb had known the full agony of the Occupation, and, time and again, had risked her own life to pass Allied airmen to safety; she had known her parents arrested and imprisoned, had lost her father and her sister in dreadful circumstances, and yet, there she was, pouring me a cup of coffee, welcoming her children back from school, talking about

the recent freeze, as though she had never in her life strayed from a comfortable London suburb.

Perhaps I labour this point; but it was one that pierced me again and again. We none of us, in Britain, can conceive what Occupation was like; and, for myself at least, it never ceased to astonish me that people like Mrs. Webb, kindly, unobtrusive, gentle, should have lived through some of the most desperate exploits of the war.

I asked her to tell the story, if she would, from the beginning, and this is what she said: Madeleine was born on 11 November 1917, and knew a happy, uneventful childhood and adolescence. She did well at school, and when her studies were ended obtained employment in the telephone service in Lille; she was, Mrs. Webb told me, a trained radio telegraphist.

As she spoke I gained an impression of a vivacious, intelligent, very sympathetic personality, of a girl who filled her life with many different activities and was interested in all. She loved travel and knew France very well; she longed, one day, to visit other countries and to speak other tongues; she liked people and had a great circle of friends, and she had, too, had many opportunities to marry. Behind all this, there was a profound religious conviction, and indeed, the letter of Reverend Mother Eleanor, and the letters written by Fraulein X, confirmed that her faith was very real and deep. In the end all her thoughts turned towards her Church and the consolation it could bring.

Her sister described her to me as 'pleasant', and this, I think, in its true sense, is the word that must describe her best; she was indeed pleasant and lovely in her life, and wholly without meanness or spite.

This, then, was the world of Madeleine Damerment when war came in 1939, just before her twenty-second birthday; she lived, as always, in Lille, with her parents and her younger sister, Mrs. Webb. Another sister, who was married, spent the war in Tarbes.

For the Damerment family, Resistance began in the very first hour; not long after the young soldier who had, during that winter of 1939-40, shared their home, left on the journey that was to lead to Dunkirk. They entered into it thus: not far from Lille there was a factory belonging to the firm of Massey Harris which was taken over by the Germans, and worked by French prisoners of war. One day during the summer of 1940, Madame Damerment was given a crumpled note which one of the prisoners had, in desperation, thrown into

the street. It said, simply, 'We are hungry, for God's sake try and get us food.'

What did Madame Damerment do? She did not say, poor fellows, but it is none of my business, I cannot help them. She acted, instead, very simply and very directly. She went to the German commandant and asked if anything could be done to help his starving prisoners. He agreed that food parcels might be sent in.

That was the beginning; from these original contacts, plans were made to organize escapes and indeed, the first of these was successfully accomplished not long after. That was the beginning; and many followed the first escapee and found freedom in Unoccupied France.

As time went by, Lille became an important point in the escape route along which Allied airmen passed on their way to Spain and, it was hoped, ultimately to Lisbon or Gibraltar and freedom.

How exactly this happened, I do not know; but Lille was always a tough, a resilient, a strongly resistant town. In the first war it had, for three years, been Occupied by the Germans and lay only just behind the front line. Lille remembered very well this visitation and when, in 1939, Germany once more was at war with France, it was thickly populated with British troops. Lille, to sum up, knew what war was about; and, by one of those strange paradoxes of the human character, it was the regions of France which knew what war entailed that were the most implacable in their resistance.

In Courteney, in my September journey, I had realized that the placid, agricultural provinces of France that had never themselves been ground small by the iron heel of war were those that most strongly advocated a policy of *laissez-faire*, of taking things as they came. But, in the industrial north, it was different; from the first, individual acts of sabotage were recorded against the Occupation forces in and around Lille. Unfortunately, as Colonel Buckmaster says in *Specially Employed*, it was a particularly difficult region to contact and supply from England. A great many German troops were stationed there, and vast numbers of anti-aircraft batteries were deployed; to attempt to send through low-flying aircraft would have been tantamount to murder for the crews concerned.

So the patriots of Lille remained largely unarmed and without contact with London until 1942; then a remarkable man, Michel Trotobas, known as Captain Michel, an S.O.B. agent, volunteered to go there and build up an organization. This was supplied with arms and explosives by means of transport lorries that brought them from other,

safer, dropping areas. Unfortunately, this group relied on the Prosper circuit in Paris for its communications with London and for this I have been told it ultimately paid the penalty.

This, however, has nothing to do with Madeleine Damerment; her work in Lille was in 1940 and 1941, long before S.O.E. was established there. But I was interested when Mrs. Webb told me that as early as 1941, she believed her sister to have been in touch with an S.O.E. agent; according to Colonel Buckmaster's book, I knew that this could not, in fact, have been the case unless, of course, there had been some chance contact with such an agent that had, for some reason or another, never been reported to London.

According to Mrs. Webb, Madeleine went one day to a hairdresser to have a shampoo, and found the girl in a state of great tension. After a while she said to Madeleine, we know what you do, to help escaping prisoners. Perhaps you will help us? I am a member of a Resistance group, and I work for two men called 'Paul' and 'Roland'; the Boche has got wind of them, and knows they use this house. There are some Gestapo men here, now, waiting for Paul and Roland to call, so that they may arrest them. Will you meet them, and warn them?

The hairdresser described Paul and Roland to Madeleine, and told her by what bus they were expected to arrive, from where and when. Madeleine met this bus, warned the two men, and took them home with her. From this contact, she was drawn more closely into Resistance activities.

Mrs. Webb then told me that Roland was still alive, but that Paul, whom she described as being very tall, thin, with blond hair and moustache, and blue eyes, and who spoke fluent German, was arrested, tried and hanged by the British after the war as a traitor.

This would, on the face of it, seem improbable; the execution of traitors after the war was not so frequent an occurrence as to have escaped public notice, and certainly such a man as Paul, if he had been accused of treason, would have been put on trial. Even had he been tried *in camera*, his execution could not have remained a secret.¹

¹ The story of 'Paul' is told in detail by Vincent Brome in *The Way Back*, published after I had written this section of my book; I have felt it best not to make amendments retrospectively, for that might constitute a slippery slope. . . .

The Way Back is the story of Lt.-Commander 'Pat O'Leary', which was the wartime cover name adopted by Dr. Albert Guérin, who holds the G.C., D.S.O. and more than twenty other decorations. He founded an escape

Nevertheless, though Mrs. Webb's story might have been, understandably, in details inaccurate, I found it fascinating that Madeleine Damerment had, as early as 1941, been involved (in a purely innocent capacity of course) with a man who was, to put it mildly, suspect.

This Paul, I was told, was last seen in Lille in May 1941; but Madeleine had, when she fled her home two months later, crossed the demarcation line with him and Roland.

It was Roland who was, in fact, the reason *why* Madeleine had to seek refuge in England; he was arrested and imprisoned in Abbeville. Madeleine sought to get him released—how she did this I cannot imagine—and was successful; but she was herself, as a result, compromised. The Gestapo came to her house, and as Madeleine was not there, her mother and father were taken in her place. They had a very disagreeable twenty-four hours of interrogation before they were released with a caution.

The Gestapo came a second time; Madeleine was again out. They came a third time, and on this occasion they were noticed by the woman who owned an *épicerie* across the road; this woman, Mrs. Webb told me, and her husband, had been of great help to the Damerments in securing for them food with which to feed the escaped

route with H.Q. in the south, that had tentacles reaching into many areas of France.

This route was known as the *réseau* Pat, 'Pat' being as I have said Dr. Guérissé's *nom de guerre*. (This accounts for the reference made by Madeleine Damerment's mother, on page 211, to the organization I.S.P.A.T. It was in fact, Intelligence Service 'Pat'.)

Paul was in truth a traitor; he worked over a long period for the Germans, escaped into the American lines at the end of the war, told a convincing story, was employed by them, and was ultimately arrested because he revealed his address to a girl friend who, unwittingly, repeated it to a member of M.I.9 who knew Paul to have been a traitor.

Nevertheless, he managed to escape (like Fritz Suhren, in surprising circumstances) and was mortally wounded some time later when resisting re-arrest by French police officers.

In essence, therefore, the story that had reached the Damerments was true; Paul—a member of the British forces—*was* a traitor; he died before he could be hanged.

Dr. Guérissé has given me the name of the hairdresser through whom the Damerments first met Roland and Paul; Roland now lives just outside Paris.

Through Dr. Guérissé, I have also discovered that Maurice Dufour, mentioned on page 134, was a member of his *réseau*; it was in this way that he knew Andrée Borrell, and recognized her at Natzweiler (page 63). Dufour married an American woman and was living in London when Dr. Guérissé last met him.

prisoners whom they hid under their roof. This provisioning, and the supply of civilian clothing was, Mrs. Webb told me incidentally, a constant headache; she remembered one pilot whose feet were so huge that no shoes to fit them could be found in the whole of Lille. Desperate expedients were necessary to equip him for the long walk that lay ahead of him. . . .

I was saying, the good lady from the *épicerie* saw the Gestapo arrive at the Damerment house, and she knew that Madeleine was due to arrive home a little later, by bus. Fortunately she knew what bus, and from where Madeleine would be coming, so she went to the bus stop and waited patiently. She was thus able to intercept Madeleine, and warn her not to return home; she never saw it, or her parents or sisters, again.

Instead, she made arrangements with Paul and Roland to escape into Unoccupied France, and, from there, to Spain, Lisbon and England. As Reverend Mother Eleanor had told me, her flight was successful; but she first endured great hardships and miseries in the Spanish concentration camp of Miranda.

The flight of their daughter did not in the least shake the determination of the Damerment family to do their best to bring about a German defeat. They went on with their escape route activities, and Mrs. Webb herself was largely involved. She was then a school-girl and considered a very suitable escort for airmen; a schoolgirl looked so innocent. . . .

I asked her if she had been very frightened and she replied, 'Yes, beforehand, thinking about it. But once I had started, once I was on my way, with an airman beside me, perhaps two or three, then fear went. I concentrated on what I had to do, and had no time to worry. I was scared, before and after, but not when I was actually on the job.'

This life went on for nearly four years; then, on 21 March 1944 M. Damerment was arrested with his wife. He was savagely beaten to force him into betrayal, but he said nothing; fortunately, Madame Damerment escaped the worst bestialities of German technique in such matters.

Both were imprisoned in the fortress of Loos, and then the Gestapo turned its attention to Mrs. Webb herself; she was closely questioned but said she knew nothing, and succeeded in hoodwinking her interrogators. She was left in provisional liberty.

It seems that Belgian S.S. were in charge of prison arrangements in the region of Lille, and, as had her mother four years before, Mrs.

Webb bearded the rats in their own hole and sought news of her parents. She went every day and was at last told they were imprisoned at Loos. She was allowed to take them a parcel of fresh linen and clothing, and, having waited from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., was able to hand it over.

Immediately, steps to outwit the gaolers were taken; Mrs. Webb wrote a message in the hem of a nightdress she had brought to her mother, and somehow managed to inform her mother that it was there; she unpicked the hem, and read it. Then she, in her turn, passed a message out by the same channel. Later, tobacco was smuggled inside in the same way.

It was March 1944 when the Damerments were taken; a few months later the liberating Allied Armies reached the area of Lille and Madame Damerment was released. By cruel ill-chance, M. Damerment was included in the last batch of prisoners to be deported from France to Germany, and left with the last train load of deportees. He is believed to have died in the vile camp of Kokendorf which was, by a strange chance, near Dachau, where his daughter Madeleine was murdered. And, even more strangely, M. Damerment was also, for a short time, imprisoned in Karlsruhe.

So that was the Damerment story—and a very splendid one it was, too. By this time evening was drawing in, and I felt I should take my leave; Mrs. Webb offered to drive me to the nearest Underground station, assuring me that it would be no trouble, and that her children would enjoy the ride. We set off; and as we drove along the tree-lined, suburban road, peaceful and quiet, I found myself gazing intently at the woman who held the wheel, pinching myself into realization that she had, not so many years ago, escorted men through the streets of Lille to a railway station, and freedom.

CHAPTER XXVII

MRS. WEBB HAD generously lent me such documents as she possessed concerning her sister's war service and I started reading them in the tube train that carried me back to Campden Hill. One of them, in particular, I found striking: I will quote it in full:

Duplicate
Tel: Victoria 8456
Ext: 8154

M.O.I. (S.P.) The War Office,
Room 532, Southern Rotunda,
18/19 Monck Street,
London, S.W.1.
17 November 1947.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to certify that—

Mademoiselle Madeleine Damerment

a French national, born at Torte Fontaine, Pas de Calais, on 11 November 1917, was during the late war employed by this Department of the War Office in connection with Underground Resistance activities in France.

After having escaped from France, Mademoiselle Damerment came to England and for some time was resident in a convent in this country. In October 1943 she volunteered to take a more active part in the liberation of her country, and was attached to this Department for training in preparation for work as a courier with a British controlled Resistance Circuit in France. She completed her training by the middle of February 1944, having in the meantime enlisted into the F.A.N.Y. Corps with the rank of Ensign. On the night of 29 February 1944 she was parachuted, together with the organizer of her circuit and their W/T operator, to a dropping point in the Rambouillet area. The circuit concerned was known as the 'BRICKLAYER' Circuit of the 'WAR OFFICE RESEAU' controlled by Colonel Buckmaster, which functioned in the Paris/Rennes area. Unfortunately, Mlle Damerment and her companions were arrested immediately upon arrival and taken to the Avenue Foch, Paris. It later transpired that the circuit to which they were being dropped had already been penetrated by the Germans. Mlle Damerment remained at the Avenue Foch until 12 Mary (sic) 1944, when she was transferred to Karlsruhe gaol. She remained in this latter prison until the 12 September 1944, on which date she and three other female members of the 'War Office Réseau' were taken to Dachau Concentration Camp, where they were executed by shooting early the following morning, 13 September 1944.

As will be seen from the foregoing account, Mlle Damerment had no opportunity of actually carrying out the work for which she had been trained, and for which she had shown a considerable aptitude whilst undergoing training. Her fortitude and courage during imprisonment were an inspiration to those other unfortunate people with whom she came into contact.

If further details of Mlle Damerment's services are required they will be gladly furnished on application being made to the same address.

N. G. Mott
Major, G.S.

The last paragraph interested me greatly. Well, I said to myself, here is a clear invitation to ask for further information about Madeleine. I must write at once to the War Office and avail myself of it.

Then for the sixth time I read the routine letter that had gone to Madame Damerment on 10 July 1946; the sixth and the last time. For no letter was sent to the parents of the seventh woman who left Fresnes on that May day in 1944, and they had heard no word of her or from her until I myself, in the course of my investigations, uncovered her identity and discovered that her mother still lived.

Mrs. Webb also gave me a cutting from a French newspaper dated 19 May 1950. It reported how, a few days earlier '*un hommage tardif*' had been presented to the Damerment family in the form of a '*citation à l'ordre de la Nation, décernée à une famille de France, la Famille Damerment.*' I was interested to learn that in France, too, these things could be done in a very casual manner, for the report went on to say that no one in authority had troubled himself sufficiently to inform Madame Damerment of that magnificent citation, and if a relation had not been an assiduous reader of the *Journal Officiel*, there could be no doubt that she would never have known about it.

The citation said that M. Charles Damerment, activated by the purest and most ardent patriotism, had enrolled himself in the *réseau* Pat and had, with his wife, taken part in all forms of Resistance. He had fed French prisoners, made possible their escape and the escape also of British airmen, had given sanctuary to those who would evade working for the Germans and to other members of the Resistance, and made an important contribution to the *liaison* services of the Maquis du Nord. Arrested on 21 March 1944 and deported to Germany, where his daughter Madeleine, a lieutenant in the Free French Forces, was also imprisoned after a parachute descent into France, and shot 13 September 1944, M. Damerment in his turn died in the same camp of exhaustion and hunger, thus giving a magnificent example of a family that sacrificed everything in the service of the motherland.

The cutting then went on to tell the war history of the Damerment

any, as related to the reporter by Madame Damerment. Certain dates and details vary slightly from those given me by Mrs. Webb, but they are unimportant.

This is what Madame Damerment had said: 'It began in July 1940. Some soldiers from this town were imprisoned in the Massey Harris factory at Marquette, a suburb of 7,000 inhabitants on the outskirts of Lille where we had lived for a good many years. The Mayor one day gave me a crumpled note that had come to him from heaven knows where. It said, "We are hungry, help us." It was signed, The Prisoners Of War.

'This appeal made me feel desperate,' Madame Damerment said. "'Mr. Mayor," I asked, "will you give me permission to attempt to alleviate their misery?"

'This plea escaped from me, as a sort of reflex action. "You have my permission."

'I had not got money, not enough, but I knew that I could rely on the entire population of Marquette. Thanks to some workmen who were still employed in the factory, I succeeded first of all in getting food and clothing to the prisoners. But, in face of their frightful distress, this seemed to me insufficient. A month later, I called on the office of the German commandant of the camp.

"I am a French mother," I told him, "and I would like to help your prisoners."

'He agreed, on condition that I would not help them to escape. "I was myself a prisoner in the war of 1914-18," he said, "and I tried four times to escape."

'A little later, I was able to arrange that our prisoners should eat in a small café close to the factory. In spite of a guard of four field policemen and a sergeant, I organized my first escape.

'M. Nichol, a citizen of Nancy, was the first soldier I succeeded in liberating, and I am still in touch with him. That was one of the happiest days of my life.

'Step by step, I organized, with my husband, a reliable escape system. Until our arrest, not a week passed but that we did not shelter under our roof an escaped prisoner, an Allied airman who had been shot down or British civilians on the run. We procured clothes for them, and false identity cards. I cannot tell you how many escapees passed through our hands, because I did not keep a count. My most cherished memory is of an American Air Force colonel who had been shot down over Belgium. His feet were so huge that we could not find any shoes

large enough to fit him. We were obliged to cut out the word "Boston" from his own boots.

'At the end of 1941 M. Paul, an Englishman, the chief of the *réseau* I.S.P.A.T.¹ got in touch with us. Then we were officially enrolled into the Resistance, and our house served as a letter box.

'We were arrested three times, in June 1941, for twenty-four hours, in October 1941 for forty-eight hours, and held in the fortress of Loos. Two years later Charles and I found ourselves in Loos once again, but this time our luck deserted us. A young woman who belonged to our *réseau*, who had been arrested a few days before us, had talked under torture.

'On 1 September 1944, in the middle of the German collapse, the Americans came to liberate the north of France, only a few days too late. All the women were set free from the fortress of Loos, thanks to the intervention of the Swiss Red Cross. But Charles (her husband) had, alas, already left to meet his destiny in the phantom train of deportees, of which the Americans were unable to find any trace. He must have died in the camp of Kokendorf, close to Dachau. For several days he was imprisoned in Karlsruhe, in the same prison as Madeleine. Neither my husband nor I had seen her since she left in 1941 for Spain, in order to join the Free French Forces. She became a parachutist. . . . I never saw her again. I know only that she was arrested in the course of a mission, near Chartres, and was shot by the Germans at Dachau.'

When I had finished reading these papers, it seemed to me even more tragic, and damnable, that Madeleine Damerment should have been dropped direct to a German reception committee. She had risked greatly in Lille; she had escaped to Unoccupied France, from there to Spain, where she suffered much in a squalid Franco prison. From Spain to Lisbon, from Lisbon to England. . . . She had trained, and set out again for France and fallen at once into German hands. It simply did not bear thinking about.

What was more, Intelligence reports received during and after the war, made it perfectly plain to London what had happened. But when Irene Ward, in the early summer of 1956, asked the Foreign Office if she could be told anything more about the manner in which the *réseau* into which Mademoiselle Damerment was parachuted came to be controlled by the enemy, Lord John Hope informed her 'there is no record to show the exact cause of the interception of Mademoiselle Damerment's landing. All that we know is that she was captured on

¹ He was not of course the Chief in fact—that was Dr. Guérissé.

landing. . . . I can only assume that in the circumstances of the time those concerned were unable to solve the mystery or if they did they failed to record their findings—probably the former reason is the right one.'

In point of fact, neither of these surmises is correct. The causes of the interception were fully recorded and fully documented in London; I could tell Lord John Hope where he could lay his hands on them.

The official attitude of Government is, however, beyond the comprehension of the ordinary citizen. Writing as one such, I do not myself mind if, in the interests (albeit mistaken perhaps) of security, I am a recipient of lies; what I do ask is that they should be convincing and efficient. What maddens me is to be told lies that would not deceive a mentally retarded child of ten. As an example of the prevarication and foolishness that goes on, I will quote now my correspondence with the War Office, in connection with the To Whom It May Concern document given to me by Mrs. Webb.

On 26 March I wrote to the War Office, addressing myself to the Department under whose heading Major Mott had written the document of November 1946, although I knew, in fact, that this department had long since been wound up.

I said: 'The mother and sister, as next of kin of the late Mademoiselle Madeleine Damerment, have been kind enough to give me a document issued by M.O.I. (S.P.) The War Office, dated 17 November 1947, and signed N. G. Mott, Major, G.S.

'This document, headed To Whom It May Concern, gives a brief record of Mademoiselle Damerment's services in the French Section S.O.E., naming the circuit for which she was to work (Bricklayer) and the circumstances of her arrest. She was executed at Dachau on 13 September 1944.

'The last paragraph reads: If further details of Mademoiselle Damerment's services are required, these will be gladly furnished on application being made to the above address.

'I would now wish, in connection with a book I am writing, to avail myself of this offer, and would be grateful if you would send me all possible information about Mademoiselle Damerment. . . .'

A fortnight later I got a reply, dated 13 April. It read:

'I am directed to refer to your letter of 26 March 1956, and to inform you that M.O.I. (S.P.) was a temporary department of the War Office which existed for the purpose of liquidating the affairs of S.O.E. which was itself a wartime organization which was dissolved early in 1946.

'M.O.I. (S.P.) closed down in 1948 and it is regretted that no further details of Mademoiselle Damerment's service are available.'

To this I replied on 16 April in these terms:

'I must thank you for your letter of 13 April and regret that I feel obliged to trouble you further in this matter.

'You tell me, as, indeed, I knew, that S.O.E. was a wartime organization dissolved in 1946. It occurs to me, however, that a great many units must have been formed during the war which were, when hostilities ended, disbanded. Am I to assume, as implied in your letter, that the records of all these units were destroyed?

'Your second paragraph is, if I may say so without offence, somewhat ambiguous. You tell me that no further details of Mademoiselle Damerment's services are available, and this might be construed as meaning either that her records do not exist, or that you are not prepared to make available information from them.

'I can hardly think that the second alternative is the correct interpretation, for I hold an open letter, addressed To Whom It May Concern, written under a War Office heading, which offers to furnish any further particulars of Mademoiselle Damerment's services that might be required. It is difficult to see why, if the records exist, that offer made in 1947 should be repudiated in 1956.

'On the other hand, whilst I will confess I know little of military affairs, it does seem strange that the records including all the files of service of disbanded units should be destroyed. Even in my ignorance, it strikes me that these might be needed in connection with matters relating to pensions and next of kin.'

I waited some six weeks for an answer to this, and when it came it was dated 23 May; I was then abroad. The letter read:

'I am directed to refer to your letter dated 16 April 1956, and to inform you that after further investigations regarding the record of service of Mademoiselle Damerment the War Office regrets that no details are available.

'The delay in answering your letter, caused only by an exhaustive search of records, is regretted.'

Sez you, I said to myself, when I read this. Early in June 1956, I replied:

'I thank you for your letter of 23 May, and regret that absence abroad has delayed this acknowledgement of it.

'If I may be blunt, I would say that I still have not got a clear answer to the question I ventured to put to you in my letter of 16 April. . . .

Briefly—are you telling me that no records exist of the service of Mademoiselle Damerment or are you telling me that you are not prepared to make available any information that may be in them?

‘In view of the letter dated November 1946, to which I have previously referred, it is a matter of some consequence to me to have an unambiguous answer, which is the reason for this somewhat distasteful persistence.’

To this, I never received an answer at all.

In fact, authority is on a poor wicket when it comes to refusing even a few, harmless details about those who died when serving with French Section, S.O.E. A number of survivors were permitted to publish a record of their wartime experiences in the field, Colonel Buckmaster was permitted to publish *Specially Employed*,¹ and, this being so, it is not easy for authority now to take the line that all should remain secret.

If it *had* taken this line from the first, if no reminiscences and success stories, biographies and autobiographies had been permitted, the position of authority would be firm. It could say, S.O.E. was a secret organization and it must remain secret; no one would quarrel with this. But it is less comprehensible that authority should say, as, in effect, it has, we do not mind letting survivors write *their* story, but we are going to clamp down, hard and tight, on any information we may have that would enable the stories to be written of those who died.

I was particularly incensed by the official attitude where Diana Rowden and Vera Leigh, Andrée Borrell and Yolande Beckman, Eliane Flewman and Madeleine Damerment were concerned, because no such impediments had been put in the way of Jerrard Tickell when he wrote *Odette*. In his Acknowledgements, he said: ‘I am deeply indebted to the War Office and particularly to Major Norman Mott who put files at my disposal and who helped with such genial patience.’

Major Norman Mott, I noticed, was the officer who had signed the document offering to give information about Madeleine Damerment. . . .

I did not grudge Mr. Tickell his good fortune; but I *did* think it hard that the War Office should give him files from which to write the story of the living *Odette*, and deny them to me to write the story of the murdered six. . . .

Irene Ward thought so too and she asked some Questions in the House.

¹ And, more recently, *They Fought Alone*.

On 22 February 1956, the following exchange took place at Question Time:

Dame Irene Ward (Tynemouth, C.) asked the Foreign Secretary if he was aware that the files of Special Operations Executive agents operating in Europe had been made available by foreign countries to British writers; and on what grounds they were debarred only in this country.

In another question she said that the files on agents who did not return from operations in the field were not made available to historians, thus precluding a record of their gallant services being made available to the public; and asked if the Foreign Secretary would ensure that the relatives of those who did not return should have as much satisfaction as those of agents who returned and had been able to write about their exploits. Lord John Hope said that 'with permission' he would answer two questions together.

Dame Irene Ward: Oh no. (Laughter.) They are two entirely different questions.

The Speaker: They may be covered in the same answer.

Dame Irene Ward: No, they cannot.

Mr. Osborne (Birmingham, Yardley, Lab.): What is the point of a Minister saying he requests the permission of the House to answer two questions together if we are not able to refuse that permission? (Opposition cheers.)

The Speaker: It is really a courtesy phrase used by Ministers. Surely the adequacy of the answer cannot be judged until it is given. (Cheers.)

Dame Irene Ward said one of the questions related to foreign countries and the other to agents dropped in foreign countries. They were two entirely separate questions. If she could not have two separate answers she would put a much worse supplementary question. (Laughter and cheers.)

The Speaker: The threat of the honourable lady leaves me quite unmoved. I think she had better hear the answer first. (Cheers.)

Lord John Hope stated that the Special Operations Executive was a secret wartime organization. Much of their activities must in the public interest remain secret. For this reason the organization files could not be made available to the public (Hear, hear). A limited amount of information not secret could be provided in certain cases. No distinction was drawn between the record of those who returned and those who did not.

Dame Irene Ward said that official people had been refused access to the files. In order that the monstrous injustice to the agents who did not return should be rectified, might she have, if she agreed to submit any manuscript to the Foreign Office, access to the files. She wanted a specific answer, otherwise she would think that the Foreign Office had something to hide. (Ministerial cries of Oh, and Opposition cheers.)

Lord John Hope: There is no one I would rather please than the honourable lady. (Cheers.) But be the consequences to me what they may, she cannot have special terms.

Mr. Arthur Lewis (West Ham, North, Lab.) said that two and a half years ago he had asked a series of questions on this disgusting episode. If the Under-Secretary would read a book called *London Calling North Pole* by Colonel Giskes, he would be ashamed at what had happened in S.O.E.

Lt. Col. Cordeaux (Nottingham Central, C.): Far too much harm has already been done by amateur authors rushing into print and cashing in on two years' wartime experience in some of our secret services. Rather than encourage such publications, would the Under-Secretary safeguard the few remaining secrets in their methods of work and, if necessary, invoke the Official Secrets Act. (Ministerial cries of Hear, hear.)

Lord John Hope: We are bound to bear security in mind first and foremost.

Dame Irene Ward asked if the Ministers would authorize an official history so that people like Diana Rowden, Lilian Rolfe and Violette Szabo and the girls and men who were with them could have as much publicity as other agents had got, and the same financial assistance which other people had got, and which was denied to their relatives. (Opposition cheers.)

Lord John Hope suggested that she should put down another question.

In due course she did; *Hansard* for 6 June 1956, 1072, Oral Answers reports:

Special Operations Executive Files (Access)

27. Dame Irene Ward asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in view of the access to the files of the Special Operations Executive granted to the author of a book, details of which have been sent to him, on what date the files were closed to other writers and on what grounds.

The Joint Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (Lord John

Hope): Special Operations Executives files have at no time been generally available to authors in the sense which the hon. Lady implies. The grant of access on the occasion in November 1947, to which she refers, was subsequently considered to have been ill advised in respect of precedent, and for reasons of security no further access has been or can be allowed.

Dame Irene Ward: I thank my hon. Friend for that information, but would it interest him to know that the files were closed in 1952 after the publication of *The Starr Affair*?¹ Will he kindly explain the relationship of *The Starr Affair* to the closing of the files, which would be of great interest to many people, because it has nothing to do with security at all, the book having gone through the usual security channels?

Lord John Hope: I have answered the hon. Lady's Question.

Maybe; not, in truth, entirely to my satisfaction. I strongly suspect that had *The Starr Affair* not been published when I started my researches, the files might not have remained so firmly closed.

With all deference to Colonel Cordeaux, no one, and certainly not Dame Irene, was asking for any information about our secret intelligence services that could possibly be of the slightest value to any foreign power. All that was asked was that some information from the personal files of agents who died should, with the permission of next of kin, be made available to writers.

Locking the stable door can be carried too far; so much has already been written, and published, by surviving members of S.O.E., that to talk about security is silly.

Moreover, the whole thing has been thoroughly discussed, documented, debated and dehydrated in France. Giskes has written *London Calling North Pole*; Bleicher has written his memoirs; a few little facts about six women who died in the service of S.O.E. could hardly blow security any higher than it has already been blown.

For better or worse, large quantities of material are lying around, waiting for anyone who has the persistence to unearth it. A lot of it lies in books already published here, in France, in Holland and in Germany. The cry 'Security' simply does not hold water; it would, I submit, be more accurate to say that authority is more concerned to conceal a series of disastrous blunders than it is to maintain secrecy on intelligence methods. What is more, authority probably did not even know about these blunders until it read about them in books. . . .

¹ In fact, published in 1954.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AS I BROODED on these matters it came to me, once again, that I had been an ass; I had discovered the previous autumn that while S.O.E. might in Whitehall be Top Secret, in France the Resistance was now an honoured page in national history, yet it had not occurred to me that Germany was, of course, the place to seek information about the German side of these affairs.

I had written once to Karlsruhe prison without fruitful result, and had let that side of the story drop. Then in March 1956, I learnt that Hugo Bleicher was telling his story in the magazine *Quick*; excerpts were published in the British Press. I read a piece on the subject in the *Empire News*, that had been written by my colleague Antony Terry, in Bonn. I snapped my fingers—if anyone could get at certain aspects of the truth for me, he could.

In the middle of March I wrote to him, asking if it might be possible to arrange for someone to have a look at the Karlsruhe records; I was travelling myself to south Germany in April, but it would be useless for anyone as deficient in German as myself to attempt the task.

I told him, of course, my reasons for wanting to scrutinize the records, and gave the names of the six S.O.E. women officers known to have been in Karlsruhe; I told him I was anxious to discover who the seventh had been, the unknown woman of Natzweiler.

Antony was superb. Three days later he wrote to me: 'I have been on to Karlsruhe prison today, and spoke to the man who wrote to you. I will be in touch with him again, and in the meantime he is going to have another browse through the records. Unfortunately, these are not complete, due to the French, in a frenzy of understandable fury in 1945, taking all the records into the courtyard of the prison and burning them! As a result when the prison authorities were asked (presumably by S.O.E. for the preparation of their case) in 1946 to prepare a complete list of all foreigners held in Karlsruhe jail during the war they had to scrape them together from all available sources and this may have gaps. Apparently the copies of these lists have been kept and are available for scrutiny, bearing in mind that they are not the originals, but 'mocked up' later as best they could.

'I have asked the prison official in question to have a talk with two old biddies who were working on the prison records back in the days of July 1944, and who, he thought, might remember something (though it seems unlikely) about the fourth girl. I often discovered

during years of interrogation of Germans that they have, in fact, amazing memories (particularly about horrors) and recap all sorts of things that astonish one, years later.'

Antony added that Bleicher lived at Tettmang, near Lake Constance, where he ran a tobacconist's. His telephone number was Tettmang 501. . . .

This last bit of information fascinated me; here I had been reading and re-reading *Colonel Henri's Story*, as though Colonel Henri himself were a character in fiction, or of long-distant history, and in fact, of course, he was alive and in Germany and might be visited; his number was Tettmang 501. . . .

This was, too, yet another of the strange coincidences that studded my quest; I had arranged to visit France and the Jura long before I had started writing a word of this book or knew that Diana Rowden had operated there. Albert Browne-Bartroli lived in Madrid, a city I had not visited for four years; but in the autumn of 1955 I had already made plans to pass through it on my way to Gibraltar, to meet the ship that was bringing my small daughter home from Australia; early in March 1956, I had arranged to visit Germany, and in particular, the Lake Constance area. And here was Hugo Bleicher, living in Tettmang. This is the sober truth, and I felt that a benevolent destiny had, for the time being, taken charge of my affairs.

I wrote thanking Antony warmly; on 21 March he wrote again:

'The prison at Karlsruhe today produced some additional information which may be of use. The official who wrote you the letter has spent hours looking through the thousands of names of French, Belgian, British, Luxembourg, Dutch and other prisoners who passed through the jail at that time on their way to various degrees of horror or death, and he was able to produce the list of names of *British* women who entered and left Karlsruhe at around the dates you name. I will give you this list now exactly as he gave it to me, just in case it may add something to your existing information. The query marks are those in the prison records.

'Women prisoners of British Nationality who arrived in Karlsruhe on 13.5.44 and who left Karlsruhe on or around 6.7.44 or 11.9.56:

Yolande Beckman (Betman?). Born Paris 29.10.11. Married. Father Jacob Betman, England. Removed from Karlsruhe prison 11.9.44
to?

Denise Borrel alias Urbain. Born 18.11.19 in Lille/Calais. Saleswoman. Unmarried. Mother was Eugenie Borrel, born in Cannes, rue Merle 13. Removed from Karlsruhe on 6.7.44 and taken to a concentration camp (*einem K.Z.-Lager zugeführt*).

Odette Churchill, née Bedigis, divorced name Sansom. Born in Dunkirk, 20.4.12. Profession: nil. Husband: Peter Churchill, address Oflag I, Germany. Removed from Karlsruhe on 18.7.44 to concentration camp Ravensbruck.

Martine Jacqueline Dussautoy. Born 11.11.17 at Tolla-Corressa. Unmarried. Profession: nil. Removed Karlsruhe on 11.9.44. Taken to?

Vera Leigh. Born Leeds, 17.3.03. Profession: nil. Unmarried. Home address, unknown. Removed from Karlsruhe 6.7.44 and taken to concentration camp.

Eliane Sophie Plewman (? Plueman) née Brown. Born 6.12.17 in Baine-Auriac. Home address: England. Married. Removed from Karlsruhe on 11.9.44 to?

Diana Rowden. Born 31.1.1915 in London. Mother: Christian Rowden, London, S.W.7. Cornwall Mews. Removed from Karlsruhe on 6.7.44 to a concentration camp.

I was, I would add here, interested that whereas Andrée Borrell had given her true name, and address, Madeleine Damerment (Martine Dussautoy) had not; I fancy this must be because Madeleine knew her family to be deeply involved in the Resistance and thought it safer to persist, until the end, with her cover name.

Then Antony launched, quite casually, his bombshell; reading his letter was one of the most exciting moments I had in all my researches.

He continued: 'In addition to the above of British nationality, the following woman of French nationality was brought to Karlsruhe from Fresnes on the same day, 13.5.44, and removed also on the 6.7.44 by the Gestapo.

'She was Sonia Olschanesky, born in Paris 25.12.23. Profession, dancer. Address: Paris. Fetched from Karlsruhe 6.7.44 by Gestapo.

'Could it be possible that the fourth girl killed at Natzweiler was Sonia Olschanesky?'

When I read this, I was perfectly sure that it was. She had travelled from Fresnes on 12 May 1944, with the seven French Section, S.O.B. officers; she had left on the same day as Diana Rowden, Vera Leigh

and Andrée Borrell; she had, moreover, been fetched by the Gestapo, and the Gestapo had collected the named three. It would be stretching the bounds of coincidence too far, I thought, if the unknown fourth of Natzweiler were not Sonia Olschanesky. I felt in my bones that she would have worked for S.O.E.; in July I proved that she had.

Antony continued: 'The prison officer I contacted has questioned the two wardresses who remember the prisoners concerned, and they said that they gave evidence at the Wuppertal Trial. Incidentally, they were interrogated by a "nice" British Major named "Barquads" (Barkworth) and by a British girl officer in R.A.F. uniform (Vera Atkins). These two old biddies say the records of the British girls were removed by the British major at the trial.

'They said that Odette had promised to visit them in Karlsruhe some time and felt hurt that she hadn't! I promised to pass this message on. . . .

'The prison officer said that it was not the prison authorities' fault conditions were not what they should have been in Karlsruhe at that time, when a prison built to house 170 was holding three times as many. But he insisted that the prison authorities had never ordered any cruelties.'

. This letter, as may be imagined, excited me greatly. It was incredible that Antony should, ten years later, have identified a woman when the whole weight of Allied investigation and authority had failed to identify her in 1945-6. What is more, it took me less than two hours' work on the files of *Libre Résistance* in Paris, in July 1956, to discover for which *réseau* Sonia Olschanesky had worked, and who her chief had been. I met him the next day. . . .

Antony also cleared up two other matters for me: I had been anxious to know what had happened to the five men who had been found guilty at the Natzweiler Trial and sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment, and I wanted to know if Werner Rohde, the camp doctor, who had been sentenced to death, had, in fact, been executed. I also wondered what had happened to Wassmer and Ott, the two Gestapo officials who had escorted the women to Natzweiler and Dachau, and who had given testimony as to their last hours.

In the case of those condemned at Wuppertal, this is the story:

Rohde, Werner. Sentenced to death 1.6.46 (this was at the first Natzweiler Trial, in respect of the murder of Diana Rowden, Vera Leigh and Andrée Borrell) and executed 11.10.46.

~~Langenstein, Fritz~~. Sentenced to life imprisonment 1.6.46. Sentence later reduced to 21 years. Transferred to French authorities 2.8.46, by whom he was sentenced to death 2.7.54. He died of illness, however, on 20.10.54.

Straub, Peter. Sentenced to 13 years' imprisonment 1.6.46. Sentenced to death in second Natzweiler Trial, and executed 11.10.46.

Wochner, Magnus. Sentenced to ten years' imprisonment 1.6.46. Transferred to French authorities 2.8.46. Returned 26.7.51. Released on remission 10.5.52.

Berg, Franz. Sentenced to 5 years' imprisonment 1.6.46. Sentenced to death in second Natzweiler Trial and executed 11.10.46.

Bruttel, Emil. Sentenced to 4 years' imprisonment 1.6.46. Transferred to French authorities. Returned 4.3.50 and released on same day on remission.

The worst criminals of the concentration camp of Natzweiler were, therefore, all executed.

In the matter of Wassmer and Ott, Wassmer is now retired, and I understand draws a pension as an ex-Gestapo official; he lives near Karlsruhe. Ott is still registered as a Kriminal Sekretær, and lives in Stuttgart.

After this exchange I was, I believed, coming to the end of my quest; there remained for me to meet, if I could, Hugo Bleicher; to see Fraulein X, and get details of the Karlsruhe prison episode; to go to Paris to search for the record of Sonia Olschanesky. That done, the story would, I thought, be as full as I could make it, though I still hoped I might get in touch with one or two people who had worked with Eliane Plewman. My hopes were not very strong, for her brother had told me that few members of her *réseau* had survived.

The year had moved on to April and, at last, Bill Simpson came to dinner. He told me of his meeting with Diana Rowden—she had been at the R.A.F. convalescent home at Torquay, recovering from an operation, when he was there between bouts of operations at East Grinstead. They became friends, and Diana told him of her devotion to France and her urgent desire to get back there, in some capacity, in order to prepare the way for Libération. Bill had been working in French Section in Baker Street, and was able to give her the necessary introduction; it was as simple as that.

CHAPTER XXIX

TOWARDS THE END of April I went to Germany, flying first to Stuttgart. The next day, I drove in a coach through Pforzheim, where Noor Inayat Khan had lain in chains for so many long and dreadful months. Pforzheim had been severely bombed from the air and, in the closing stages of the war, submitted to heavy shelling. It was still in a semi-ruined state, and showed more scars of war than any other town I visited on that trip.

Thinking of Noor Inayat Khan, this left me unmoved. I thought of her chained hand and foot; hands in handcuffs, feet fettered, and a chain from the handcuffs on her wrists to the fetters on her ankles. The Governor of the prison told Jean Overton Fuller that the Karlsruhe Gestapo had given him special instructions concerning her: she had to be kept under the most severe régime, in chains by day and by night, in solitary confinement, and without the possibility of communication with other prisoners. None of the guards was to speak with her; he was forbidden even to do so himself.

Nevertheless, he went at once to the cell where she had been put, and there found her, in the prescribed chains. He was horrified that he should be required to keep her in this condition night and day—even when she ate, which would mean that she would hardly be able to lift a spoon to her mouth. He ordered that when food was taken to her the handcuffs should always be removed and replaced when her feeding bowls were collected.

In all the fifty years of his service he had never known a prisoner to be kept under such conditions, or heard of one so kept elsewhere. Gradually, he took it upon himself to ease the conditions of her imprisonment, in defiance of his specific instructions from the Gestapo; he must have been a man of strong character and kindly instinct.

At the time of this imprisonment, Noor Inayat Khan was just thirty years old, her height was 5 feet 3 inches, and her weight, when training in England, was 7st. 10lb.; these statistics are the measure of her splendour, that one so slight should have proved so fearful an enemy of the Third Reich that she must be kept, twenty-four hours a day, chained hand and foot. . . .

So I drove through Pforzheim, catching no glimpse of the prison; and a few days later I was at Friedrichshafen on the shores of Lake Constance.

From there I was taken, by a man working in a travel office, to

isny; I had thought this would be a full day's expedition, but at luncheon my escort told me he had to be back in Friedrichshafen for a meeting at three-thirty. This seemed to be my opportunity to meet Bleicher, for I would have, unexpectedly, an afternoon free, and our return route lay through Tett nang. I asked, therefore, if I might be dropped there, and also asked my host if he knew where Hugo Bleicher lived; it happened he was an old friend, so all was arranged.

It was a hot afternoon in April, and Tett nang is a beautiful town. My companion stopped the car outside a little tobacconist's shop, on a wide bend of handsome road flanked with charming houses. We went inside and introductions were made; then I found myself sitting at a table opposite Hugo Bleicher.

I looked on a short, well-covered man whose grey hair was going a little thin. . . . My feelings, that moment, were I fancy similar to those one might entertain if told This is Genghis Khan, or Meet Sherlock Holmes. . . .

Bleicher had, for me, been a character from a book or from horrid history, and here he was, benevolent, cosy, a kind of ill-omened Pickwick. For a few minutes, I was entirely nonplussed.

This was due, in the main, to the fact that Bleicher was, in personality, and against all probability, sympathetic. I had expected to be repelled by a chill distaste; instead, and I must admit quite against my will, I found him appealing. He was so inordinately pleased with Bleicher . . . he was the little man who had made good, the *petit caporal* who had outwitted the whole of the British Intelligence service, the brave little chap who had fought on to the end, knowing all lost, and yet valiant, always, in his duty; he was Buck Ryan and Colonel Lawrence and Admiral Hall, Sir Galahad and Robin Hood and Peter Pan, all rolled into one.

Self-esteem, on this scale, is disarming; the adult cannot accept it as reality and is, involuntarily, lulled into a dreamlike daze. I knew pretty well the part Bleicher had played in the war and yet, listening to him talk, as the sun fell slanting across the road, his children dandled on his knee, I found myself entering into his own dream world, beguiled by the myth of Bleicher, the little corporal of the lone hand. . . .

I could understand, very well, the effect he must have had on prisoners in his hands, prisoners who had, too often, first been subjected to monstrous abuse at the hand of the Gestapo, who had been

submitted to hateful tortures first conceived in the dark crevices of a mediaeval mind; he would seem warm, kindly, sympathetic, a father figure there, indeed, as he suggested, to help and not to harm. . . . I could see him, patting the knee of a woman prisoner, putting an arm around her shoulders, murmuring that she had suffered enough, that he wanted only to spare her fresh miseries. . . . He must, I thought, have had great power in those circumstances. He was a man conceived to please women, so that he might himself secure the satisfaction he craved.

The interest, in retrospect, of this meeting lay not in what Bleicher told me, but in the impression I formed about him. The influence he had gained, and the undoubted successes he scored on, I think, be attributed partly to his physical form, to that bizarre blending of a strong sexuality with a powerful paternalism. His personality, in these regards, was perfect for his job; he could both rouse the blood and calm it. On his own showing, women were his one abiding interest, the one well from which he must drink. It did not matter, during the war, whether they were friends or enemies, mistress or prisoner; to him, all women were the same, and designed for one purpose.

He was also, without question, possessed of an exceptionally acute brain.

So he had worked, and worked well in an evil cause. It is fair to record that no atrocities were ever pinned on Bleicher; the British held him for months, interrogated him daily, turned him inside out and yet, in the end, handed him over to the French, preferring no charge against him. In due course the French, too, released him; Bleicher went back to Germany.

Guilt by association is an odious concept; and yet, Bleicher, in turning his prisoners over to the Gestapo, was in this way guilty. He knew very well what might, what often did, happen to such unfortunates. Is it enough to say, I did not myself turn the screw? Is the man guiltless who helped to put the screw in place, who found flesh to bind within its claws? Bleicher volunteered for the work he did; had he really been, as he so constantly stresses, humane and chivalrous, could he have endured the knowledge that those he hunted and tracked down would, in the end, be burnt by fire and quenched with waters, beaten by steel and left to die lonely, agonized deaths?

To those of us who would shrink in horror and disgust from inflicting wanton pain on anyone, the role of the little corporal cannot

be likened to that of a misunderstood Sir Lancelot. His postwar, professed 'love' of France is merely nauseating.

These things apart—and even in Bleicher's presence they were much in my mind—our conversation was not very fruitful. He remembered Denise (Andrée Borrell) and he remembered Prosper; as well he might. He also remembered Vera Leigh; he had himself arrested her. But of the others he claimed to know nothing.

He was very grandiose in his attitude to the women couriers of S.O.E.; 'poor little things,' he said, waving a careless hand, 'they did no harm, I let them go their innocent little ways, unless they had the misfortune to cross my path, to get in my light. Then, of course, I had to take action. But on the whole, they were of no consequence; I was concerned with more important matters.

'So it was with Vera Leigh, Simone; as a matter of fact, she had lodgings quite near me, for months I would watch her tripping along the pavement in the morning, so busy, so *affairée*. She was of no interest to me; so long as she kept out of my way, she could play at spies.'

But, I said, in the end you arrested her. Why?

The story Bleicher then told me was entirely different from that spun by Roger Bardet; it is relevant to add that it bears little connection with what he wrote of the episode in his own book, *Colonel Henri's Story*.

Vera Leigh, Bleicher told me, had acted as liaison between the chief of her *réseau*, and its radio operator. By mistake (the mistake being that one branch of German military Intelligence did not know what the other was doing) this radio operator, Bastien (Marcel Clech) was arrested. According to Bleicher, he knew all about Bastien until, one day, he suddenly changed his address without, as Bleicher disarmingly admits, his knowledge. Bastien continued, however, to transmit and by ill chance was picked up by a D/F car. As a result, the S.D. made a search and Bastien was arrested with another operator, Jacques. Bleicher was incensed, for these arrests ruptured the wireless contacts with London which he had been using to deceive Baker Street.

He then made the point that other people had made before; a known agent, left at liberty, believing himself undetected, is in many ways better than an agent captured; then another takes his place, who may avoid detection.

So it was after the arrest of Bastien. London sent another radio

operator, and poor Bleicher could not find him. Bardet, for some reason or other, could not induce his chief to tell him where the new operator lived, nor who he was; all contacts were made through Vera Leigh. Thus, said Bleicher, she had to be sacrificed; if she were arrested, Bardet would have to be allowed direct contact with the radio operator.

And so it was. . . .

I will not bother to pick the holes in this story that could easily be opened; I quote it, simply, as an interesting sidelight on the way German counter espionage worked. The bit about the arrest of Bastien conforms with what Bleicher wrote in his book; the circumstances he gave of the arrest of Vera Leigh were entirely different. No doubt he has changed his mind since writing it.

In passing, I would mention that Bleicher gave it as his^{my} opinion that Vera Atkins had more brains than all the rest of French Section put together; it may well be that in this he is right.

I probed a little longer, but clearly there was no more coming about the women I was interested in. Instead, we passed to the triumphs of Bleicher, a subject more to his taste. He told me, for example, of his dealings with La Chatte, that notorious double agent. A month or two later, in Paris, the other side of this episode was told me by someone who had been closely involved; a Frenchman with a distinguished and unsurpassed record of service with S.O.E.

From the story of his dealings with La Chatte, Bleicher got on to the seduction of radio operators from their allegiance; this I did find genuinely interesting.

Nearly all captured radio operators collaborated, Bleicher said; nearly all. When broken by torture? I asked. 'Certainly not, of their own free will; I worked on them, mental pressure only, persuaded them it was for the best, no one could blame them, everyone else did it. . . . We would give them evidence of this; in the end, nearly all of them came to the conclusion that so many sets were being worked back to London by our service, without London ever guessing, one more would not matter.

'If they could not be persuaded to send genuine messages, we could at least persuade such men to sit down at a key, and tap out dummy messages. We put a German operator, a highly skilled man, next to them, and he learnt to imitate their touch and technique of transmission. This was enormously successful; far more successful than we ever dared hope. In most cases, London accepted without

question messages transmitted by *our* operator as coming from *theirs*.'

I report this not because I believe that it is necessarily true, but because the details Bleicher gave in some cases, the circumstantial evidence he casually produced, persuade me that some radio operators *did* collaborate—possibly under stress of physical torture Bleicher has now let slip from his memory—and that, shall we say, rather more than one radio was worked back by the Germans to London without London ever tumbling to what was happening.

So the time passed and, presently, I rose to take my leave. Bleicher said: 'People are always asking me how I can endure this humdrum life in a quiet little town; how I can forgo all the excitement of my life as an Intelligence agent. The truth is, the uneventful life suits me. I have put all the rest behind me, it is now a closed book. I want only to live peacefully, with my family.'

'But your magazine articles?' I asked. 'Surely those articles in *Quick* are hardly consistent with a closed book?'

That, Bleicher replied, could not be helped. 'I did not write them; the journalist concerned was determined to write of my exploits, with or without my co-operation. As they were to be written anyway, I did not see why I should not get my share of the profits.'

O Bleicher! There you revealed a great truth. You spoke for all the Germans who did not want Hitler, who did not like the Nazis. But Hitler was there, and the Nazis had come anyway, so they did not see why they should not jump on the bandwagon. It is this fatal flaw in German reasoning that has led to the ruin of my world, and yours.

CHAPTER XXX

A FEW DAYS LATER I met another German, of very different calibre: Fraulein X, who had shared a cell with Madeleine Damerment, and whose letters had been sent me by Reverend Mother Eleanor.

We drove to meet her from Bonn, down the long, wide, efficient and sinister autobahn that snakes southward beside the Rhine. We stopped for luncheon on the way, and I was fascinated by the prodigious quantities of food consumed by the other patrons. Then, in a wet and early dusk, we found Fraulein X; she was a *good* and sincere

and very simple woman, and had suffered much. There was in every gesture she made, in every line of her red-scrubbed, homely face, a nervousness that atrocious experience had deeply engraved. I felt myself in the presence of a woman basically kindly, honest and well-intentioned who had been cruelly treated by an unkind fate; she was essentially a woman who should never have been called upon to make decisions or face a dreadful destiny. Yet she had done so, and come back from her ordeal triumphant; triumphant only in that she had kept her self-respect, for her circumstances were precarious and harsh.

We went to a café, ordered coffee, and talked. I was from the beginning impressed with her bearing and her courage; it is not fashionable, not, indeed, wholly without danger in Germany today to speak to foreigners of the cruelties of the Nazi régime; and Fraulein X spoke of them freely and fearlessly in a room surrounded by flapping ears.

Her father, she told us, had been an anthropologist; and this in itself was sufficient to have shown her the fundamental absurdity of Nazi racial doctrine. Her family had from the very beginning been strongly anti-Hitler, and even when the régime had assumed the worst characteristics of a monstrous tyranny, she had been unable to hold her tongue.

She had had narrow escapes many times; at last, in June 1944, she spoke once too often. She had been out with a Swiss, and, sitting in a public garden, she had told a foolish little joke about Hitler and Goebbels. It was, indeed, so foolish it is worth recording, as an example of the sort of joke that could under the Nazi régime land a woman in prison.

According to this anecdote, Hitler and Goebbels were walking together, Hitler in a mood of depression. Goebbels, to cheer his despondent Fuehrer, said: Let us stop some of these school children, and ask them what *they* think; you will see they are all your devoted servants, confident of victory.

So they stopped several children, asking each one in turn whom he thought would win the war. One said the British, another the Americans, a third the Russians. . . .

The fourth was wearing his satchel not on his back, but across his chest; and he replied to the question: 'The greater German Reich will of course be triumphant.'

Much pleased, Hitler gave him some money, and then asked: 'Why

do you wear your satchel across your chest instead of on your back?' And the child answered: 'To hide my Star of Judah. . . .'

Having told this story to the Swiss, Fraulein X was tapped on the shoulder; she had been overheard by a snooper, and was taken off for interrogation. The Swiss, considering discretion the better part of valour, slipped quietly away.

On this occasion, Fraulein X was released after two hours; but on 15 June at 7 a.m., the Gestapo came for her, and she was interrogated for another five hours. Then she was taken into protective custody and sent under escort to Karlsruhe prison.

Here, she was put in a cell occupied by Madeleine Damerment, whom she knew as Martine, and two other German prisoners; one of these had refused to do compulsory labour in an arms factory, the other had been discovered stealing bread coupons for a pregnant friend. Such was the Third Reich. . . . And Eliane Plewman was in the next cell.

Fraulein X described in minute detail the circumstances of her confinement, and the layout of the cells. As she spoke, I felt a great thankfulness that Diana, and her six comrades, had been sent to Karlsruhe prison and not to a concentration camp. Karlsruhe, clearly, had been a stern and comfortless place, but it was, compared with the revolting bestialities of the concentration camps, almost humane. I had read a few months earlier Lord Russell's book, *The Shadow of the Swastika*; it would be more accurate to say it had been my intention to read it, for in fact the disgusting inhumanities it recorded were too much for my stomach. Set beside the stupendous wickedness of the concentration camps, Karlsruhe as described by Fraulein X still clung to some vestiges of what the world used to know as civilization.

The cell she occupied with Madeleine Damerment—and all cells on this floor were similar—was a long, narrow room, at ground-level, with a spy hole in the door. It contained a w.c., a folding table, two seats and two beds made of planks laid together and covered with straw-filled sacks. The cells had, in fact, been designed for two prisoners; they then held four.

One of the beds—that occupied by Madeleine—folded up against the wall during the day. Two women shared the remaining bed, which was somewhat wider, and the fourth slept on a straw-filled mattress on the floor. There was, too, a table with a cupboard above it, and some hooks for clothes. And there was one window, high and

small, perhaps one foot by eighteen inches, barred, and it was not possible to look through it. . . .

In these circumstances, then, they lived; Diana Rowden, Vera Leigh, Andrée Borrell and Sonia Olschansky for two months, Yolande Beekman, Eliane Plewman and Madeleine Damerment for four; Fraulein X was herself set at conditional liberty a short time before Madeleine left, with her two companions, on her last journey to Dachau. She did not know, until she received a letter from Hitchin in 1947, what Madeleine's fate had been; but, as we drove back to Bonn, I asked Antony Terry if, from his perfect knowledge of German, he had read any nuances into Fraulein X's words, when I had questioned her on this subject, that were not directly revealed. He said yes; he was convinced that Fraulein X had known that Madeleine, and her six friends, were doomed.

The régime of the prison was stark: at 6.30 a.m. prisoners were wakened by a bell, and they washed, made the beds and cleaned the cell. The hatch was then opened, and food was pushed through. At 8.30 the chief wardress, clearly a repellent creature, made her inspection. Whilst this was in progress the prisoners had to stand in the corridor, and say for what offence they had been imprisoned. During this time, said Fraulein X, they managed to talk with prisoners from the adjoining cells, and pass messages, though this was of course forbidden.

In the morning there was exercise in the prison yard. The women formed two circles, of which the outer had, of course, to move faster than the inner. Fraulein X, who had a tubercular infection of the lung, was of the inner circle; all the S.O.E. agents were in the outer circle. This exercise lasted half an hour, and if it rained it was cancelled.

The rest of the day was devoted to work—for which Fraulein X said they were thankful—with luncheon from 11.30 to 12, coffee at 4 p.m., and supper from 6 to 7 p.m. Bed was at 8 p.m., and there were no lights in the cells.

The food was poor, but not intolerable; it consisted mainly of bread, often mouldy, black coffee, thin soup, sometimes salad or vegetables, very imperfectly washed, with a small ration of margarine every other day. On Sundays they had stew with noodles; for supper each day there was bread, occasionally cheese as well, soup or margarine. Fraulein X got special rations, in view of her tubercular troubles, and it should be recorded that not only did she share these with her companions, but that she also, clearly, took it absolutely for granted

that she should do so. She told me this with a perfect simplicity, with not even a hint that it had ever entered her head that she might have eaten her own rations herself; or that she was in any way to be commended for generosity. It was something she had done as a matter of course.

Amongst the luxuries allowed Fraulein X were a measure of fresh milk daily, butter and sausage. I was glad when she told me that, having her small ration of butter, neither she nor her companions ate their margarine—they cleaned their shoes with it! This, I thought, indicated high morale and it also, I hoped, showed that the official rations, even if monotonous, were not entirely inadequate; after all, Fraulein X's small extras were divided amongst four, and would not have satisfied really severe pangs left by the usual diet. I thought it a good sign that the margarine went on the shoes. . . . Fraulein X added that the bread ration was quite large, even if somewhat unattractive.

On this diet Madeleine, surprisingly, put on a very great deal of weight; it must, I suppose, have by its deficiencies affected her glandular system in some way. Fraulein X, having trained as a nurse, massaged her each day which, she said, gave them both a good deal of pleasure; they had always laughed heartily during the massage session.

The work was not hard; they peeled potatoes, ground coffee, sewed, made hairslides. They were, in fact, thankful to have something with which to occupy themselves. Madeleine was skilful with her fingers; she made, from the scraps of material left over from the sewing, a Sacred Heart. She planned that, after the war, she would give this to the Convent of Hitchin; but it must in the event have been destroyed with all her small personal belongings after her death.

Such was the official round; but apart from this, there was something much warmer, infinitely more splendid, and that was the affection that sprang up between Madeleine Damerment and Fraulein X. That Fraulein X loved Madeleine I do not, for a second, doubt; and from the way she spoke, and the things she said, Madeleine, I believe, must have felt for her too a strong affection.

At first, Fraulein X said, Madeleine was suspicious and reserved; she knew Fraulein X to be German, and she feared she might be a Gestapo stool pigeon. Gradually, she came to realize that this was not so, that she could trust her, and from that time they talked together

incessantly, made jokes, laughed, and, by sharing their common miseries, lightened them.

They discussed everything under the sun, Fraulein X said; they spoke of the future when all would be clean and true and free again, and of the past that had held passages of tranquillity. Madeleine chattered about her home, her parents; and I realized that she had, in this, deceived Fraulein X. Her parents, her sisters, were in Occupied France, and Madeleine could not trust anyone with their true names, and histories, and addresses. Instead—and this I found infinitely pathetic—she had woven a web of fiction, with flashes of truth concealed in it. She had spoken with truth of her sisters, her nephew, the love she held for them and for her mother and father; but she had given them false personalities, dreaming of them in an imaginary world as princes and princesses, ballerinas, painters, musicians. . . .

Only the Convent of Hitchin had she spoken of with complete frankness; the good nuns, she knew, were safe there from any possible harm that might come if Fraulein X should be released and speak indiscreetly of what she had told her. Thus it was that Fraulein X was able, the war over, to write to Reverend Mother Eleanor. Later she wrote, also, to Madame Damerment, Madeleine's mother. She showed me the answers she had received.

They were wonderful letters Madame Damerment had written, for remember her husband and her daughter had been cruelly murdered. Fraulein X must have asked her if she felt, for her, a German, hatred, for Madame Damerment had replied: 'No, my child, I do not hate you. As a good Catholic, and a good Frenchwoman, I should not hate anyone. . . . I pity you for what you have suffered.'

So we talked together, Fraulein X, Antony, his wife and I. A picture emerged that was curiously happy; Fraulein X told how they had somehow procured a pack of cards, and told fortunes; how they had sung, told each other stories, invented plays, recollected, what they could, of books they had read and enjoyed. It was a picture of tremendous strength of character, of two women in adversity never letting down the defences, holding fast to the good things, faith, courage, charity, kindness, comradeship.

As time went by, Madeleine spoke very frankly to Fraulein X of her work as an agent. She told how she had landed to a German reception committee, how she had, on arrest, been badly treated but not subjected to physical torture. She had, instead, been made the object of lewd and degrading jests of a kind that are, it seems, dear

to certain types of German. Of this, Fraulein X said, she was reluctant to talk yet in the end did so, as if by speaking she cleansed herself a little of sordid memory.

Physical cleanliness, in the prison of Karlsruhe, was not easy; they had a shower every fourteen days, that was all. Nor were they ever provided with lavatory paper. Clothes had to be washed with soda; they were given salt also for washing purposes, but used it instead on their bread. Madeleine, Fraulein X said, wore a grey skirt and pullover. . . .

This was, in comparison with the squalid gibes of the Paris Gestapo, easy to bear. . . . Yet, in spite of her great courage, Madeleine was sometimes heavy with despair, and would cry at night. She was twenty-six years old, and strong and vigorous and pretty, and she wanted, very much, to live. . . .

So the weeks of that summer of 1944 had passed in cell 17 of Karlsruhe prison; Odette was, according to Fraulein X, in cell 14, and Eliane Plewman next door, in cell 16. These two she knew by sight and she knew, too, Yolande Beekman; she had, Fraulein X said, dyed her hair blonde at some stage, and when in prison it grew out, and showed its true colour at the roots. She did not know Vera Leigh, or Diana, or Andrée Borrell; and she had never heard of Sonia Olschanesky. . . .

They were in Karlsruhe when the attempt was made on Hitler's life; that day, Fraulein X had been taken to a clinic for treatment, and the news reached her. The doctor who was attending her asked if she had heard about it, and then gave her what details he had learnt. He added: 'You're glad, too. . . .' He made her promise not to tell anyone but, Fraulein X said, she did, and that night they all went to bed in excellent spirits.

I have the name of that doctor, but I will not record it. I have also the name of a doctor who when asked for medicine for a sorely ill prisoner said: 'We have none for your kind; go back to your cell and die.'

In September 1944 release came to Fraulein X; she never saw Madeleine again. She had for her an enormous admiration; she could not appreciate what Madeleine had done, nor did she understand the role she had played, but she did recognize, clearly, fully and for ever, that she had been privileged to meet, and call friend, a woman of superb courage and profound piety; a woman, perhaps, of a calibre she had never met before and coming to it, face to face in the

sombre darkness of a prison, recognized it at once in all its splendour.

I know that Fraulein X will remember Madeleine all her life, and believe herself blessed to have shared with her a dark little cell. I do not think it would be too much to say that Madeleine had, for her, been a revelation; from her she had glimpsed a facet of human nobility that had hitherto been unrevealed. In a sense, those weeks of captivity may have been life's greatest gift to Fraulein X, herself a decent, kindly, honest soul; they had shown her to what pinnacles of sacrifice and strength and courage mankind in all its frailty may yet aspire.

CHAPTER XXXI

SO I CAME towards the end of my quest. A great deal, I knew, would never be cleared up, many things would remain for ever a mystery. But, before the end, I knew I must trace Sonia Olschanesky; and I hoped, very greatly, that I would, too, be able to prove that she, and Eliane Plewman, had worked for *réseaux* that were connected with the Prosper affair—I felt, in my bones, that they had; that the reason why 'my' women had received such special treatment was that they were all linked with the webs spun by Hugo Bleicher, with Prosper, and Henri Frager and Roger Bardet, and with the radio sets that had, week after week, sent false messages to London.

It was so, I knew, with Madeleine Damerment, Andrée Borrell, Vera Leigh, Diana Rowden and Yolande Beekman; if I could prove it had been the case, too, with Eliane Plewman and Sonia Olschanesky, if ever I could trace her background, the story would be, in essential, completed. I would know why those women travelled together from France to Karlsruhe in May 1944; because they had all been linked by the same web of treachery, and, by traitors, were condemned therefore to die. All except Odette; she alone, for reasons unknown, had survived.

I had, I felt, come a long way in a year; from starry-eyed simplicity to shocked understanding of some of the factors involved. I was not happy in my knowledge; I could have wished I had remained for ever starry-eyed, could have believed that the story I set myself to unravel had been a straightforward one of courage and determination, that there were no treacheries to record, no stupidities to condone.

The story as I now knew it was utterly different from the one I had thought to discover; it bore no relation to the chapters of a Good Girls' Book of Golden Deeds. The deeds were, God knows, golden; but the background was too often grey and shoddy and without honour.

I could have wished that the shell had remained uncracked, that the glossy picture of success and subtlety had remained untarnished. One thought only comforted me, that no tarnish could ever touch the reflections left by those women who had died, the innocent victims of a vast series of mischances that ranged from horrible treachery to bungling by those who should have known better.

For them, then, the sacrifice; for us, the promised fruits of a victory they helped to win. For them there had been no compromise; how lamentable that for us, only ten years later, compromise should have already grown again to monstrous stature. . . .

We have shown ourselves too venal, too weak, too foolish, to profit from the opportunity they bought us with their blood and with their lives. Nothing, I thought, as another July came with dripping leaden sky, could touch their greatness or their glory, and in that one must find what comfort one could; the magnitude of their achievement must be set not against the poor rubbish we had chosen to buy with it, but against their own backcloth of steadfastness, self-sacrifice and strength. They had painted the picture; and it must stand by itself, undirtied by the dusty fingerprints that had been smeared on the surrounding walls.

In this mood I came again to Paris, and found the two last links I ever hoped to forge in my chain.

It proved childishly easy to identify Sonia Olschanesky, to prove she had worked not only for S.O.E., but in a *réseau* closely in touch with Prosper, with Bleicher, with Yolande Beekman and Guy Bieler.

I went, simply, to the headquarters of *Libre Résistance* in the rue Paul Cézanne and, its records at my disposal, started my search. There were some eighty S.O.E. *réseaux* listed, and each one had a file; I could, I knew, go through them one by one, but hoped to find some comprehensive list of agents that would save me this considerable chore.

It was a hot day, the Secretary was out, and I was entirely my own master; brooding on the difference between the London and the Paris approach to these matters, I rummaged through the cupboards and came upon a dusty sheaf of papers, marked Agents P2. I did not

then know what P2 meant—I discovered later that it was applied to full-time agents, who drew pay from a *réseau*, and did no other work—but turned over the yellowing pages until I came to O: and there I found the names Olschanesky, Enoch, Olschanesky, Sonia. . . . It was, I think, the most supremely satisfying single moment in all my quest. I knew, beyond any reasonable doubt, that Sonia Olschanesky had been the fourth woman murdered at Natzweiler.

The list gave other information; it told me that she had joined the *réseau* in March 1942, as an *agent de liaison*; she had been arrested on 22 January 1944; she had the rank of *sous-lieutenant*; she had lived at 72 Faubourg Poissonnière, Paris; and, in the last column of all, I read her destiny: *Deporté sans nouvelles*. . . .

Deporté sans nouvelles; well, I was now in a position to remedy that. Unfortunately, there was a blank in her record under the heading: *Réseau*, but, fortified by the knowledge that she *had* been an S.O.E. agent, I started to go through the eighty files until I found for which *réseau* she had in fact worked.

It took just over an hour. The files were in alphabetical order, according to the code names of the circuits; I discarded, in the first place, the files belonging to *réseaux* that I felt it improbable Sonia should have worked for, *réseaux* that I knew operated far from Paris, or had no connection that I had traced with Bleicher & Co., placing them to one side for scrutiny if I should not find her in a more likely quarter.

I went through, perhaps, a dozen files and then I came on the pink folder marked Robin; and there, in the list of the agents who had worked for it, was her name once more: Sonia Olschanesky.

In this file there were a few, meagre, additional details; that she had been born in Paris 25.12.23 (the date given in the records of Karlsruhe prison), that she had become a paid agent, P2, in November 1942, that her address was 17 rue Bleue, Paris; not the Faubourg Poissonnière, but this was a *quartier* I knew from the days when I had worked in the rue de Gramont, and I knew the two addresses to be close to each other.

Her brother, I read, had acted as a letter box. He had joined the *réseau* in June 1943, and had been arrested on the same day as Sonia; of him, too, the record said he had been deported, and no further word had been received from him.

I cannot describe the emotion I felt at that moment. I had become a little obsessed by the fourth woman of Natzweiler, and it was

supremely satisfactory at last to have identified her. I remembered, as I stood there in the hot and shadowed corridor where I had been working, that Vera Atkins had told me, at one of our early meetings, that she believed this fourth woman to have been Polish. She must, then, have seen the record of Sonia Olschansky when she was doing her great work of detection at Karlsruhe; but why, in God's name, had this clue not been followed up? Why had no one bothered about Sonia? Why had it been left to me, twelve years after her death, to identify her as an agent of the *réseau* Robin—Juggler in the English code list—and trace any living relations she might have?

I realized that this I must do; and the first step was to find who was the *liquidateur* of the *réseau* Robin. By this time, the secretary of *Libre Résistance* had returned, and at once I asked her who he might be. It was not on her files; but immediately she telephoned the French Ministry of War, asked for the relevant department and, within a matter of seconds, had got the answer.

The *liquidateur* was an M. Weil, who lived in a street hard by the rue Bleue and the Boulevard Poissonnière; just round the corner in fact.

I thanked the secretary, and left. The last key had been given me, and I had but to turn it. I found myself, suddenly, nervous and decided to sleep on the matter before taking any further action.

CHAPTER XXXII

BEFORE I SLEPT on this decision, however, I discovered a great deal more about the Prosper affair, about Major Anthelme, with whom Madeleine Damerment dropped to immediate capture, about Henri Frager, Guy Bieler and Stockbroker, for whose circuit Diana Rowden had worked. None of this additional information was in itself sensational, but it did tie up a lot of loose ends, and, moreover, further strengthened the links I had already managed to bind between all these people, and the women radio operators and couriers who had worked for them.

There was, however, one small snippet of information that was for me of vital importance—I learned that Captain Sydney Jones, alias Elie, alias Felix, liaison officer to Henri Frager, had, in 1942, been sent to the Marseilles area to make contact with various resistants and

that, as a result of the report he subsequently submitted, Captain Skepper, alias Bernard, was sent to Marseilles in May 1943.

Eliane Plewman had worked for Captain Skepper's *réseau* in Marseilles; and Roger Bardet had admitted his betrayal to the Gestapo of Captain Jones, who had as his courier Vera Leigh. . . . This, then, was the last knot tied in that particular rope; Eliane Plewman, too, had worked for a *réseau* linked with men who knew Prosper and Frager, Bleicher and Bardet; all, now, fitted neatly into pattern. All, except the recently identified Sonia Olschanesky; but I had not the slightest doubt that I would find that she too had been connected with these people.

Once established, the link between Eliane Plewman, and the seven other women who travelled with her to Karlsruhe, proved a strong one; and that evening in Paris I learned much that wove even more closely together the *réseaux* to which Vera Leigh and Andrée Borrell and Diana Rowden, Yolande Beekman and Madeleine Damerment had belonged. There could, I thought, be no longer any shadow of doubt as to why they had been sent together as a group to Karlsruhe, why they had each one been murdered by direct order from Kaltenbrunner himself; they knew too much. Each one of these women had been caught by threads that led back to the 'radio game', to Hugo Bleicher, to Roger Bardet; there must be no chance that they might be liberated, and report what they knew to London.

I learned that one of the first contacts given to Prosper was that of a very courageous Frenchwoman who worked for the independent organization known as Carte in the south of France; Henri Frager was, until January 1943, when he broke away to form his own group, Carte's second in command.

I learned that Prosper was dropped blind on 1 October 1942, near Vendôme, with an assistant; he had been given three addresses in Paris, amongst them that of Denise (Andrée Borrell). The assistant who had dropped with Prosper proved useless, and Denise took his place. Archambault arrived on 1 November 1942, being parachuted to a circuit in the region of Tours; he started transmitting regularly in March 1943. A second radio operator, Lt. Agazarian (Marcel) arrived in December 1942, and worked successfully until June 1943, when he returned to England just before the big disasters of that month.

At the time of his arrest, Prosper's organization covered twelve departments, had thirty-three dropping grounds prepared for action, and by 1 June he had received 254 containers; between the 12th and

21st of that fateful month he received a further 190 containers. There can be little doubt that the Germans knew about most, if not all, of these drops.

I learned that Marcel Clech, the radio operator with whom Vera Leigh had provided liaison, had left England at the end of April 1942, headed for Paris by way of Gibraltar and Lyons. On arrival in France, he heard of the arrest of the man who was to be his chief and the break-up of his organization;¹ he was diverted to Tours, where he made contact with a Frenchman later suspected of working for the Germans. Another link, then, between German counter espionage and Vera Leigh.

I learned that the contact between Guy Bieler and Yolande Beekman in St. Quentin and Prosper had been closer than I had suspected; and that after the arrest of Prosper and many of his groups in June 1943, only four French Section circuits remained, undetected as it was thought, in what had been the Occupied Zone: Bieler in St. Quentin, Trotobas in Lille (the town where Madeleine Damerment had worked before her flight through Spain to Lisbon and England), Cowburn in Tours, and the Frager 'Donkeyman' *réseaux*; of these, the *réseaux* of Bieler and Frager were, by that time, almost certainly compromised.

I learned that Major Anthelme's original mission to France had been political; he left England for the first time in November 1942, and was in touch with Prosper. He also organized a circuit in Le Mans, under Lt. Garry, who was later given Noor Inayat Khan as a radio operator. It will be remembered that when Major Anthelme and Madeleine Damerment were dropped in February 1944, to a German reception, London believed that the reception was to be organized by Lt. Garry who had in fact been arrested the previous October. Yet another link, here then, between Madeleine Damerment and Prosper: for it was the arrests of June 1943 that obliged Major Anthelme to return to England.

I learned that Guy Bieler had first dropped with Lt. Trotobas (Farmer) and a radio operator in November 1942; this came as a considerable surprise to me, as I had thought he had in fact dropped (as Colonel Buckmaster described in some detail in his book) with Yolande Beekman in September 1943. But this, it seems, was not so; he had in fact arrived in France nearly a year earlier, and he, too, had been given contacts with Carte, and thus with Henri Frager. . . .

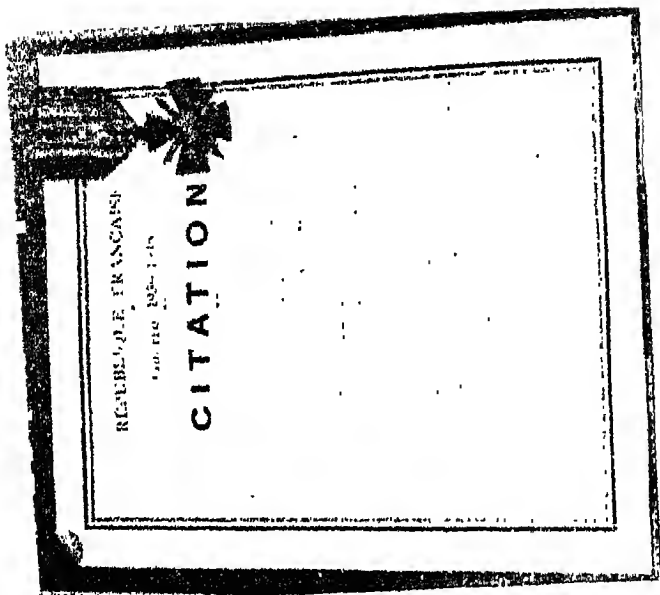
¹ This man had been connected with La Chatte.



(Above) Odette Gobeaux shows how Yolande Beckman passed an aerial through her attic window

(Below) Madame Arend with the radio set on which her sister, Andrée Borrel, picked up *messages personnels* transmitted by the B.B.C. to Resistance workers in Occupied Europe





The posthumous *Croix de Guerre*, with Citation, awarded to Diana Rowden and now in the possession of her mother



Eliane Plewman
Croix de Guerre

Trotobas had no contacts, and had to build up his own organization which was, no doubt, fortunate; but he had no direct radio link of his own with London, and passed his messages through Prosper, as also did Bieler. . . .

It was not until March 1943 that Bieler established his own contacts, and started work in the area St. Quentin-Valenciennes, for he had, on landing, hurt his back and spent some months in Paris. In May 1943, he performed his first acts of sabotage, organizing thirteen cuts in important rail lines carrying German supplies.

After the arrest of Prosper in June 1943, Bieler had to send his messages through Tours; it was not until Yolande Beekman joined him in September 1943, that he established direct contact with London. Yolande had started transmitting a few weeks later, and she and Bieler had been joined by a third S.O.E. officer, 'Christophe', only a day or two before their arrests.

I established that the story told Mrs. Rowden, that London had not known for months of Diana's arrest was untrue; Stockbroker as I related in Chapter VI had escaped, wounded, to Switzerland, and had reported the full story of the capture of Diana and of Gabriel to London. Immediate steps were taken to reorganize the disrupted circuits.

I learned that Prosper had also maintained constant liaison with two other *réseaux*, that of 'Ernest' in the area of Meaux, and 'Robin' in the area of Châlons sur Marne—and then the very last piece dropped into place. 'Robin'—the *réseau* to which I had discovered, that very afternoon, that Sonia Olschanesky had belonged. Within a few hours of that discovery, I knew that she too had been linked with Prosper. . . .

So, next day, I decided I must meet M. Weil; but it was my last day in Paris, I was leaving that evening by the Night Ferry. I felt it would be best not to rush matters, better to write from London, first, and explain my interest. All I would do that day, I decided, would be to have a look at the two addresses given for Sonia Olschanesky in the records of *Libre Résistance*, and check that M. Weil did still live where I had been told he did.

After lunching with my husband, we strolled down together from Montmartre; the first Olschanesky address, that in the Boulevard Poissonnière, turned out to be a large apartment house. It seemed futile to make inquiries about a woman who had lived there perhaps, for all I knew, only a few weeks, thirteen years before. The other address, in the rue Bleue, covered a vast, decaying house built round

a dingy courtyard; it seemed pointless to make inquiries there either.

So we turned the corner, and came to the address given me as that of M. Weil. I had thought that there would probably be a list in the hall giving the names of the tenants of the various flats in the building, but hardly had my husband and I entered it than the *concierge* popped out and asked our business.

Cornered, I said I was seeking to learn if a M. Weil lived there? Yes, certainly, I had just missed him, he had gone back to his office only a few minutes before, but Madame was at home. . . . And, before I could stop her, the *concierge* had darted upstairs, saying she would bring Madame down.

Well, there it was; perhaps, I reflected, it would turn out for the best. And then a woman came down the stone stairs, tall, white-haired, handsome, with a clean-cut, intelligent face. She looked polite, but a little puzzled, a little interrogative. I apologized for my intrusion, and said simply, that I was a writer, that I was interested in the work M. Weil had done for the Resistance, that I was particularly interested in a woman who had been a member of his *réseau*, Sonia Olschanesky.

At once, she replied, 'Oh yes, Sonia, poor girl. We knew her well; she is dead we think, we have had no news of her since she was arrested by the Germans years ago.'

Then she said: 'But M. Weil can tell you of these things. Go and see him: his office is only a few yards away.' And she wrote out the address on a slip of paper. I would record here that my husband, who felt the *concierge* should be rewarded, offered her a tip of honourable dimension which she refused with a touch of displeasure. I had never before known a French *concierge* refuse a tip for services rendered.

That was that; so we went there and then to see M. Weil. That day all seemed to go with magic ease. I asked the receptionist if I could see M. Weil, giving only my name that would convey nothing to him. She came back, and said he would receive me. So my husband and I walked into his pleasant, white-panelled office. I started my explanations again, in French; he replied in excellent English.

I repeated my set piece—I was a writer, I was interested in the work done by S.O.E. *réseaux*, I was interested in Sonia Olschanesky. . . . At the mention of her name, I felt that M. Weil was pricked into sharp attention. At once he replied, 'Sonia, she was a wonderful girl, I thought the world of her. She is we suppose dead; her brother also.'

Then, prompted by my questions, he told this story; He had

founded the *réseau* Robin, and he had known Prosper; Sonia had acted as a courier and when, in the autumn of 1943, things had become too hot for him and he had escaped to Switzerland, she had taken over control.

She had, moreover, made a wonderful job of it, young girl though she was. She was strong, discreet, intelligent, entirely without fear. And then, M. Weil told me she had been arrested as a result of the arrests of Guy Bieler and Yolande Beckman in St. Quentin. . . . Once more, everything fell into place.

Someone, M. Weil said, had talked in St. Quentin; and he referred to a newly arrived organizer, who had, he believed, after capture been taken by the Gestapo to Paris and used as a decoy. Friends had warned Sonia against him, warned her not to keep a rendezvous he had arranged; she had said she would go, and if she did not like the smell of things then, would cut all future contacts. But she did not return from that first meeting; and nothing had been heard of her since.

Except, M. Weil said, for one postcard, that arrived we know not how; she may have dropped it in a street, or thrown it from a window, and it was picked up perhaps by a decent German and posted, perhaps by a foreign worker who had no cause to love the Nazis; at all events, it arrived, and it said we were not to worry about her, she was all right. It bore, M. Weil said, a Karlsruhe postmark.

I had, while he talked, been debating with myself whether to tell M. Weil that I had strong reason to believe that Sonia Olschansky had been murdered at Natzweiler, but he had told me her mother and one of her brothers were still living and once again, this quest had ceased suddenly to be a form of detective story for me, and had become closely allied with flesh and blood tragedy. It seemed a heavy responsibility to suggest to M. Weil that I knew what had happened to a girl he had known and greatly admired, whose mother still lived and, perhaps, had hopes her daughter did too. I might be wrong. . . . But when M. Weil told me of the postcard with the Karlsruhe postmark, I knew I could not be.

To gain time, I asked if Sonia had been Polish, and he said no, of Russian extraction. Her parents had left Russia after the Revolution and had made a new home in Chemnitz; this, too, they had been forced to abandon when the Nazis came to power, and they had set up yet another home in Paris.

It was, for Sonia, to be the last soil into which she would send new roots.

It occurred to me, as M. Weil spoke, that he spoke of Sonia as Adèle le Chêne and Madame Guépin had spoken of Andrée Borrell, as Mademoiselle Gobeaux had spoken of Yolande Beekman, as Madame Juif and Madame Clerc had spoken of Diana Rowden; he spoke of her not only with appreciative regard, nor merely with the warmth of one friend for another, but with a strength and intensity of feeling that revealed a far deeper emotion. I felt that in Sonia, M. Weil recognized he had known someone cast in a quite exceptional mould, and that memory of her courage, fortitude and sense of duty would burn in him fiercely for so long as he should live.

In the report of the Natzweiler Trial, the evidence given by one of the prisoners, Brian Stonehouse, had contained descriptions of the four women who had arrived there for execution, and I had, I thought, been able to identify from these Andrée Borrell, Vera Leigh and Diana Rowden. With this in mind, with the idea that it would add to the evidence if Sonia Olschansky had resembled the description given by Mr. Stonehouse of the fourth woman, I asked M. Weil what sort of a woman she had been in appearance.

At once he took out his leather notecase, and, without a word, handed over a photograph. As I looked at it he said: 'That is Sonia. . .'

She had, I thought, been a beautiful woman, with a finely proportioned face, large eyes and a sweet mouth; it was a simple photograph, without artifice, a reflection of a face only, without the added interpretation of character that can be achieved by a camera in the hands of an artist. Yet, somehow, I felt it had affinity with the photographs I had seen of Eliane Plewman, Madeleine Damerment, Andrée Borrell: I never met any one of them in the flesh, and their faces on paper may deceive me, and yet I believe they had some indefinable common factor. Perhaps good looks and great vitality allied to a rare and wonderful spiritual strength was the bond that bound them together.

When I handed the photograph back to M. Weil, I thought I must tell him what I suspected of Sonia's fate, but still playing for time, still reluctant, I asked if that postcard from Karlsruhe was positively all that had ever been heard of Sonia, and he told me it was. He had, he said, directly after the war ended, enlisted the aid of every conceivable French authority—and that had included the 2ème Bureau—but to no purpose. Nothing had ever been discovered.

Then, suddenly, I told him I believed I knew what had happened to her; that she had been murdered at Natzweiler on 6 July 1944,

and I told him, briefly why I supposed this. He listened with acute attention, and when I finished he said: 'After all these years, I don't know whether I want to know the truth or not. . . .' And he shook his head, as a dog shrugging water from its fur. It was a gesture I found deeply touching; as though he were trying physically to throw off painful memories.

I did not pursue the matter further. I murmured some words of sympathy and, as it was clear I was holding up his business affairs, rose to go. Before I left I said: 'If I do hear anything more, that would seem to connect Sonia Olschanesky with the woman murdered at Natzweiler, shall I tell you?'

At once M. Weil replied, 'Yes, please, I would be very grateful, if you should have any news. . . .'

So, with my husband, I left. I felt I had perhaps been something less than wholly frank; for I had, even then, no doubt that Sonia had in fact died at Natzweiler. But I had not been prepared, that afternoon, to meet M. Weil; it had all happened too suddenly, I had not—and this was very thoughtless and foolish—given consideration to the probability that Sonia would have living relatives who might be in ignorance of her fate. It had happened too quickly; within twenty-four hours I had traced Sonia to a S.O.E. *réseau*, found the man for whom she had worked, learned from him that no word, save one postcard, had been received from or about her since her arrest. She had been for me a name, a source of speculation and, within a few hours, I had identified her, and come face to face with the man who had been her chief. It had not occurred to me to plan what I should do if I traced Sonia Olschanesky, if I discovered she had parents living, should they have had no news of her fate.

Less than twenty-four hours before, I had not even known she had worked for S.O.E.; on Wednesday, Sonia was still a name on a list, on Thursday she was a person whose parentage, background and life had been clearly revealed. I could blame myself that I had not given thought to the problems such identification would present; but the fact remained that I had not.

A few hours later I was in my sleeper in the Ferry; I remembered the emotions I had felt in the same circumstances nine months before, when I had lain awake, reading the book John Starr had given me, the record of the Abbé Guillaume. Then I had been pleased with all I had discovered; but now I knew a great deal more. The quest was, in essentials, over; I knew all I had hoped ever to know, and more. I

knew the story of each one of the seven women who travelled with Odette Churchill to Karlsruhe on that May morning twelve years before, and I knew that each one of them had been touched by treachery, and had, therefore, given her life in forfeit.

As I listened to the clanging and banging that told me that the coach in which I lay was being chained into the hold of the night packet, I thought the story was one of monstrous irony. Seven women had died that France might be free, and it was not at all improbable that they had died because one or two people had preferred to live as German pimps rather than offer their own lives too, for France.

CHAPTER XXXIII

SHORTLY AFTER MY return from Paris, I injured my spine and spent many weeks in hospital, escaping home only shortly before Christmas.

Work on this book was, to all intents and purposes, suspended. Only one bit of grist came to my mill in all that slow, golden autumn, but that was valuable. It was a letter from M. Julien Villevieille, the *liquidateur* of the *réseau* Bernard, that to which Eliane Plewman had belonged. As I have said on p. 201, I had, many months before, written to M. Villevieille and received no answer. This I had mentioned, when in Paris, to an official of the headquarters *Libre Résistance*; I had thought, perhaps, that M. Villevieille might have changed address, or, indeed, have died. For I knew that he had suffered torture and internment in a concentration camp, and those who survived such horror often came home with their health permanently impaired.

This official must, I think, have written himself to M. Villevieille, for some weeks later I got a long letter from him. This is what he said:

'I am grateful that you should have undertaken to write a book about my old comrades of the *réseau* "Monk" Buck, relating their activities during the war; a laudable intention to pay just homage to many heroines, among them your friend Mademoiselle Diane Rowden and Madame Plewman, whom I knew as Eliane Prunier, and who acted as a link between Major Skepper, the chief of the *réseau*, and myself, who was responsible for the section to which belonged French agents.

‘Together we undertook many dangerous acts of sabotage, attended many parachute drops. Eliane supplied, through her graceful bearing, her courage and her sweet nature, the element necessary to spur us on. She shared a life that was hard and full of risks without ever losing her tranquil and unruffled serenity. I would stress that her courage withstood all tests.

‘An agent of the Gestapo, called Bousquet, who managed to slip into the *réseau* while I was away on a mission in the Vaucluse, lured us all to arrest, after my return on 24 March 1944, in the home of Major Skepper, 8 rue Mérentié, Marseilles; there we were captured by the Gestapo and this man Bousquet, a traitor to his country.

‘In spite of our firm orders, obeying only her own courage, and in the hope of rescuing us, Eliane Plewman, accompanied by the radio operator Arthur Steel and a French friend, attempted, the next day, to force an entry to the flat, which was surrounded by agents of the Gestapo; but both Eliane and Arthur were arrested before Eliane could fire the weapon that she had succeeded in drawing.

‘Thus they came to join us at 425 rue Paradis, Marseilles, the headquarters of the Gestapo where we had, since the previous evening, been undergoing torture.

‘Eliane suffered with dignity and courage the tortures that were inflicted on her by those sinister butchers. She swore she had never known us, and, in spite of our pitiful physical condition, as our cells were near to each other she sang at the top of her voice telling us to hold on, and that we would manage to escape.

‘The warders, captivated by her audacity, her personality (which had much of the southern temperament in it), which covered with outward gaiety a heart that was both proud and honourable, had been won over; but the suspicions of their chiefs brought our plans to nothing.

‘After fifteen days of this agonizing régime, which was so horrible I cannot bring myself to write about it, I was unhappily separated from my English comrades, and from Eliane Plewman, who gave me words of encouragement as I passed her cell.

‘Transferred to the prison of Les Baumettes, and afterwards interned at Compiègne, I was, on 2 July 1944, removed to Natzweiler Struthof, and then on to Dachau, where I was liberated on 28 May 1945. I had had no news of the fate of my comrades, and it was not until my return to the “*Centre Liquidateur*” that Captain Hazeldine, of the Buckmaster organization, told me it was assumed that Eliane Plewman,

Major Skepper and Arthur Steel had been murdered by the Hitlerian tyrants.'

Monsieur Villevieille ended by apologizing for the long delay he had imposed in answering my letter, explaining that his health was poor and that he had felt he must wait for a moment when he could write calmly, yet sincerely and truthfully, about memories that were still painful. The heroic pages of history that concerned the part played by women in the Resistance, he said, were written by their nobility of spirit.

When I read this letter, I wished that I had not mentioned, in Paris, that I had written to M. Villevieille and received no reply. It had, from the beginning, been my firm resolve never to press those who had taken an active part in the Resistance, above all, never to press those who had suffered. My rule had been to write once, and, if no answer came, to leave it at that; it was easily comprehensible that such people might prefer not to rake over the tortured past. I felt that I had, perhaps, forced M. Villevieille into writing when he would have preferred silence.

So 1956 drew towards its close; and, just before New Year, I managed to get the address of a Madame Régis, who, as Madame Suzanne Goute, had, I knew, worked with Eliane Plewman and Arthur Steel.

I wrote to her explaining my purpose. At once she answered, saying: 'I would be very happy to give you all the information you desire. Those days still live in me. I guard religiously my memories of Arthur and Eliane and Henry (Charles Skepper), whose secret heroism was, perhaps, the most sublime of all heroisms. This year, I have been on a pilgrimage to Munich, and thoughts of Eliane were with me always.

'I regret that after having lived so intensely beside these comrades—and after having shared and run with them so many risks—no links remain with the organization that brought us together. You have, in a sense, provided such a link, and I thank you for it.

'I shall try myself to put in words my recollections. You can have of them what you wish.'

This letter, of course, pleased me very much; yet as I read it I sensed, too, a small cloud. Here I felt sure was yet another woman who had worked for a S.O.E. *réseau*, who had, for long months, risked her life for it, and at the end, had been abandoned without a word being sent to her about the fate of her comrades.

This was, in fact, the case. I have thought much about this matter,

for it caused me great distress. I met so many people who had, like Madame Régis, run infinite risks in the service of the French Section, S.O.E., who had worked with its British officers, sheltered them, fed them, shared appalling dangers with them only to be dropped like a hot potato when the war was over. Not one of them expressed bitterness about this, but I did sense, only too keenly, a profound disappointment that it should have been so.

One must be realistic and admit the difficulties. Thousands of French people worked for S.O.E. *réseaux*; it would not have been easy to contact them all, to tie up all the threads. But, given the will, one cannot help feeling that something more than was done would, in fact, have been possible.

Madame Régis, when I met her, was particularly perplexed that no attempt had been made to learn facts that might be of comfort to the relations of those who had died. She had expected, ardently desired, to tell those who had loved Eliane, Arthur and Henry of their last months; she had wanted to express herself the profound admiration and affection she had felt for them. She could not understand why no personal contacts of any sort had been permitted. I believe she felt that she had failed Eliane, Arthur and Henry in that she had not done them this last service: had not given what comfort she could to those who mourned them.

Then, in February, I met her; she came to meet me at St. Charles station in Marseilles, and drove me to her home where she had invited me to be her guest. As I got into the car beside her, I experienced, as I had when first meeting so many people of the Resistance, a feeling of warm sympathy and understanding. With Madame Régis I was immediately at ease and relaxed; I thought that we would become friends, and indeed, this was in fact the case.

Her flat was in a great block in the Avenue Rodocanachi, within a stone's throw of the house used during the Occupation by the Gestapo; the house where Eliane Plewman and Arthur Steel and Charles Skepper and Julien Villeveille and countless others, were tortured.

We sat by a wide-spreading window and talked; how we talked. I discovered, *en passant*, that Madame Régis had been a famous woman aviator; that she was a sculptor of very considerable powers; that she had a deep streak of the unconventional in her. As she talked, I liked her the more, for in all she said there was a strong thread of wit and perception, an unexpected combination of common sense and very

agreeable inconsequence. To listen to her was, in a strange fashion, almost to have lived her life in the Resistance.

She had taken immense pains to assist me, and had written and had typed a long account of the months she had spent as an S.O.E. agent. It was an admirable document, and I cannot do better than quote it in full; in translating it I have been very conscious of the French saying that a translation is like a woman: if faithful it is not beautiful, and if beautiful, not faithful. I have tried on the whole to be faithful.

In conversation, Madame Régis expanded on various incidents described in her text, and where I have thought these additions valuable, I have inserted them in their proper sequence. The text printed in inverted commas is, therefore, that written by Madame Régis; the interpolations are my own.

I should explain, also, that whereas Eliane Plewman was known, in clandestinity, as Madame Prunier, Madame Régis also knew her real name, and referred to her always as Eliane. She also knew that the real name of the radio operator, M. Saulnier, was Arthur Steel. But she did not know the real name of the chief of the *réseau*, Charles Milne Skepper, and referred to him by his cover name of 'Henry Truchot'. As Madame Régis uses the names Elianè, Arthur and Henry in her text, it is simpler to keep them thus.

'Arthur Steel, Eliane Plewman, Henry Truchot, Jean Hellet, Maryse Hilsz, so many heroic comrades, of which I am the sole survivor!

'For me, it all began one day at the home of Maryse Hilsz, in Aix-en-Provence. We had been drawn together long ago by our love of flying; we had often flown as a team, and she, even more than I, had raged against our enforced inactivity. "Ah, to fly again, even if I had only an old bathchair with wings," she said. "When I can't fly, I die of my injuries; of my spine, which I crushed at Istres, of my skull, which I fractured in Sweden. But when I fly I do not even feel them."

'Then, in November 1942, she asked me one day: "Would you like to fly again?" "Of course," I replied. "We might be given aircraft to make secret flights to England. Do you want to be in on it? And would Jean Heller, do you think?"

'When I replied to both questions in the affirmative, she took me to Marseilles to see Pierre Massenet, who was head of a Resistance group. That was my first contact, my first assignment. We spoke remarkably little of aircraft, though; we spoke rather of a visit from

a certain Monsieur X who would shortly spend a few days with me at La Cavalière, in the department of Var.¹

This Monsieur X Madame Régis was able to identify to me as the late Captain Sydney Jones, who was later to be betrayed to Bleicher by Roger Bardet when working in Paris in close contact with Henri Frager. It will be remembered that Vera Leigh was his courier.

La Cavalière is the name of Madame Régis's villa in the hills above St. Raphaël, and should not be confused with the small town of that name lying between St. Tropez and Hyères.

'I cannot remember the dates precisely. I think it was in December 1942 that this Mr. X came to see me at La Cavalière. He did not look in the least English, and he spoke French "*comme un Titi Parisien*."¹ We gossiped about everything except the Resistance, and I remember that he amused himself by sawing up a great quantity of wood for use in the winter. I have since learnt that he was an important figure in the British network of *réseaux*.

'After several meetings in Marseilles with Pierre Massenet, I was told that they were expecting a young radio operator, and that my house La Cavalière—surrounded by woods, and far from any town or village—would be an ideal place for this sort of work. I was told: "A young man will call on you, and give the password. Please give him lodging."

"This precious password was something like "*Argent frais et bleu d'azur*". Not having played this game before, I feared I would never remember it. I would say to myself: "I've got grey hair (silver) and I dress in blue. My aircraft were always silver and blue. I live at Roquebrune-sur-Argens on the Côte d'Azur." But all this only muddled me more, in spite of the constant presence of silver and blue!

'Then one day (in September 1943)—in the morning—I was in my bath when I heard someone moving on the patio outside the house. I got out of the water, quickly pulled on a dressing gown, and still dripping, went out to find myself in the presence of a young man barely twenty years old, very tall, very dark, with magnificent blue eyes, and who had evidently the desire to be received by me.

'It may have been because I was taken by surprise, but in any case, I did not at that moment remember anything about a radio operator. And I did not know what to say. He waited for the password. It was his strange attitude that made me realize who he was, and I realized too that I must say something. So I immediately started to say something stupid, like "What wonderful weather, the sky is azure blue. . . ."

¹ 'Titi'—Teddy boy, perhaps?

And then I forgot completely what the second part of the password should be. I thought of grey instead of silver, and I got in a terrible muddle. Then the young man kindly led me out of my difficulties. "And I am very glad to be at Roquebrune-sur-Argens. . . ."

"*Argent frais*," I said, retrieving the situation; and he was delighted that he had not come to the wrong house. I installed him and his large suitcase in the room that had been prepared for him.

"The house was not equipped with electricity, and his radio had to work off accumulators. He had four radio transmitters and receivers in his cases, which I mixed with mine in a box room. At first, he thought he would transmit from some Roman water conduits which were nearly 6 feet deep and which carried for 5 kilometres the water supply of Haute-Cavalière. The entrance to these conduits was very difficult to find, but it was impossible to leave radio apparatus in them because of their humidity. Arthur therefore installed himself in the "Greenroom" on the first floor of my house, and his suitcases next door in the box room. His aerial ran out of his room, crossed the living-room, and was finally hooked up with a nappy pin in the library. "Like that," he said, "I can take it down quickly if there is an alarm."

"In the meantime, it was visible to all!

"What a charming boy Arthur was! He enjoyed his work—was very audacious—had a complete disregard for danger—spoke excellent French. "My mother is French," he told me. He was very musical. He was a student of music in London, and he played the flute. At the beginning of the war, he had been enlisted into a military band; he had to attend many funerals in London! "We had an easy time," he said, "but it was boring, and I was a very bad soldier. This upset my father. One day I thought I had had enough, so I went to see my colonel. Sir, I said, I'll do anything else, but I don't want to stay here any longer. A few days later the colonel sent for me: Are you still willing to volunteer for anything? he asked. Yes, Sir. Very well, you will become a radio operator."

"And it was thus that Arthur joined S.O.E."

I feel that Arthur Steel must have been pulling Madame Régis's leg. . . .

"At that time, in order to have more privacy, I employed only one young maid who came each morning from Roquebrune, and who was called Andrea. She was Spanish, and she realized at once that there was something mysterious about Arthur. As there were at that

time many young *réfractaires* (men who were in some sort of trouble with the Occupying powers), she thought I was hiding one of them, and I had no fears therefore, that she would be indiscreet; the more so, as she quickly fell in love with the handsome young man, and wanted to protect him. Thus it was that she was not astonished to find, one day, when making his bed, a Colt revolver! And on another occasion she found a strange little cube of gelatine, with leaves like a book, and which was in fact his secret code!

'Arthur transmitted each day at different hours, and usually received instructions from London during the night.

'He had placed the radio apparatus on a rubber mat to deaden the noise, but it was fortunate that the house was a long way from any other habitation for it was always possible to hear the crackle of morse outside, and we had to keep a look-out.

'While visiting Pierre Massenet one day, I met Henry, the leader of our group. He was English from the top of his head to the tip of his toes. He spoke French *too* well, his grey flannel trousers and his impeccable blue shirt bore no resemblance to the ersatz, rationed clothing French people had to wear. His long legs, encircled by grey flannel, moved indolently and with a pliancy that was entirely English. In order to look French, he wore a beret which merely served, however, to accentuate his own racial characteristics; to give the impression of being a southerner, he gesticulated with British phlegm in a manner that bore no relation to what he was saying. I found it wildly funny to watch him, and I loved to listen to him talking.

'In the evening, in the silence of that house lost in the wood, without light except that thrown from the fireplace where the logs cut by Mr. X were burning, I would hear the door open quietly, and there would be Henry, very happy, I knew, to find himself for a few hours far from Marseilles, in simple surroundings, and not in forbidden territory encircled always by danger.

'Henry would sit down by the fire, and we would chat for a long time. He would tell me nothing that he was not free to confide, but I knew that he had been a prisoner of the Japanese in China. He spoke to me of the horror of that gaol, where he had been locked up in a steel cage with forty Chinese without room to lie down, and with only a little water and a bowl of rice each day for food. They were covered with sores which they licked like dogs. One day he was transferred to Hong Kong, to an ultra-modern prison; he had a wash basin in his cell, but he was very ill, for he had got beri-beri. It was

while he was there that he learned he was to be set free, and exchanged against some Japanese prisoners held in Gibraltar.

"You must have been relieved when you heard that. . . ." "No. At that moment, a woman whom I had known committed suicide. I was interrogated, and it began all over again. . . ."

'From the moment he arrived back in England, Henry begged to be allowed to do something useful, and he was sent to Marseilles, where he set up house in rue Mérentié; this was the centre of affairs, the office from which orders were sent and where messages were delivered. We were told that a courier would be sent to us to deal with these. We were astonished when she turned out to be a charming young woman who did not look in the least warlike. Her arrival in France was full of drama. Parachuted into the countryside at night, she drifted over a farm where a dog, sensing her presence while she was still hanging from her parachute, barked incessantly. She managed, nevertheless, to land without giving an alarm, but she sprained her ankle in the process. Encumbered by her brief-case and the huge sums of money that she carried in it, she decided to hide it in a bush, and to return for it later. She did recover this brief-case, but the money that had been in it had disappeared.

'She went off to look for the people whom she was to contact in the nearest town. Eliane, brought up in Marseilles, spoke excellent French. As she got no reply from these people when she knocked at their door, she made inquiries and discovered from the neighbours that they had been arrested by the Germans. The first link in the chain that should have led her to Henry in Marseilles was missing. She decided therefore to go to her friend Madame Chaix-Bryan (now married to Eliane's brother Albert Browne-Bartoli), who, contacted by Henry, was able to give her the address in the rue Mérentié.

'From then onwards, Eliane acted as a shuttle between Marseilles and Roquebrune, sometimes travelling by train, sometimes driven by Jean Hellet in the celebrated lorry we called "*le gazo du roi*".

"This vehicle, invaluable for the transport of parachuted material, and for running errands, had been besought by Arthur over the radio, who said: "It is so indispensable the King will pay for it from his own Privy Purse." Hence the name, "*le gazo du roi*". Jean Hellet bought it cheaply; it was an old Ford truck, to which had been added two charcoal burners. We fixed in these burners small red electric lights, to give the impression that the charcoal was burning, for when we were in a hurry we used petrol.'

Perhaps it should be explained that petrol was obtained from black-market sources; none was available for ordinary French civilians. The ruse of the red lights was employed to deceive over-inquisitive observers into believing that the lorry was running off its charcoal burners when it was in fact running on petrol.

'Eliane would arrive, then, in this vehicle, or by train, and she would stay with me for several hours or several days, depending on the messages delivered, until an answer to them was received by radio. For her, too, these intervals at La Cavalière afforded a certain respite from danger. She would walk in the woods with Arthur, and I have a small photograph of them in a gully, where we collected tortoises. She spoke to us often of her mother, who was, I believe, in Spain or Portugal.

'Eliane, intelligent, with a gift for languages, spoke, as well as English, Spanish, French and German. She had an extremely balanced character, which had a happy influence on the rashness of our impetuous Arthur. She scolded him for making superfluous radio transmissions, in the course of which he ordered an overcoat, his flute and a Christmas pudding. The overcoat, because the one that had been bought for him in Marseilles by Henry was insufficiently elegant, the flute because he wanted to make music, and the pudding for the historic Christmas that we celebrated in an atmosphere of indescribable emotion.

'Arthur said: "No pudding, no Christmas. Mother must make me one, and they must send it to me for Christmas."

'I tried to assure him that I would do my best by his Christmas dinner, but he was not persuaded. He attempted, without success, to call London with a supplementary radio transmission. Now, we knew that it took only ten minutes for the radio detection vans stationed at Anthéor to get on the road, and head towards the area where a radio was transmitting. We were advised to be as quick as possible in our transmissions. I had my eyes fixed on the clock, and saw the time pass rapidly as Arthur tried to contact London. He called London for 15—25—50 minutes. It was not until he had been calling in vain for 60 minutes that Arthur gave up.

'I was certain we were going to be arrested on just the day when fifteen people—who knew nothing of our activities—were coming to celebrate Christmas with us.

'That day, Christmas Eve, everything seemed to go wrong. Eliane had arrived from Marseilles by train, carrying a message rolled up

stood in the corridor with some German officers. As she spoke their tongue, she entered into conversation with one of them, who at a certain moment asked her for a light. Eliane had two boxes of matches in her pocket, but could not tell one from the other by touch alone. The officer had, however, seen her light a cigarette, so she could not pretend she had none. Very shaken, there was nothing she could do but hand over one of the boxes at random. Both contained matches. The officer then put it in his pocket! At that instant, Eliane was certain that she had been unmasked, and was astonished when she was allowed to get off the train at Roquebrune.

"The first thing she did on arrival at the house was to check the contents of the box still in her possession. There was nothing in it but matches. What on earth was to be done? We had a hasty conference. Warn Henry?

"At that moment, the box fell to the ground, and disgorged the twist of paper, which had been caught up in the cover. Anti-climax.

"We were all a bit unnerved by this episode and decided it would be dangerous, with many people in the house, for Arthur to transmit from his room. He must go to the Roman conduits in the side of the hill. Eliane went with Arthur and the suitcases, and then came back alone to dress for dinner. She was a pretty and elegant young woman, and I very much wanted that our Christmas Eve dinner should be a success: it would make an unforgettable memory.

"Present were Maryse Hilsz and Jean Hellet, my daughter Renée and her husband—Henry had been unable to come—friends from Nice and Marseilles who knew nothing of our work and, to serve us, we had little Andrea. Fifteen people in all. I have said that the first cause of anxiety had been the incident on the train. There was a second. We were to sit down at table at nine o'clock, and Arthur was due to return from the woods at seven. At ten o'clock, he still had not arrived. I made some futile excuse to the guests, apologizing for keeping them waiting, and then I heard a noise in the garage. It was Arthur, who burst in, panting, his clothes torn and dirty. "What's the matter?" I asked him. "I've been chased by dogs, and I had to dash through the bushes."

"What dogs were they? Some weeks ago, the S.S. had installed itself in Roquebrune. Had they got police dogs? Or were they dogs which, driven from their homes because there was no food for them, ran wild in the woods?

Sonia Olschanesky



Madame Olschanesky looks at a photograph of her daughter



Hugo Bleicher

'Arthur had been severely scratched. I excused him to my guests, saying that he worked in the forest. There were, at that period, *réfractaires* who had taken to the *maquis*, and I thought it best that it should be imagined that he was one of them; it was less dangerous.

'We sat ourselves at the table, and amongst the "initiated" the tension was high. If the dogs had been police dogs, they would pick up Arthur's scent, and we would all be arrested. The evening seemed to have started badly.

'In spite of this, several bottles of Blanc de blanc, and the passage of time, restored some measure of calm. Then a trigger was pulled that might have set off a real explosion. Arthur had discovered wine when he came to France. He said to Eliane one day: "When we get back to England, I'll buy a boat. I'll sail to the Côte d'Azur, and I'll fill it to the brim with wine and take it back home." "It wouldn't be allowed," said Eliane. "That won't matter: after what we've done, they won't be able to refuse us anything," Arthur retorted.

'Ah, the dreams of those brave, and sometimes feckless, children! They knew only too well how time dragged interminably when engaged in work surrounded by danger for twenty-four hours each day. And they said, "The invasion will take place in November. . . . They promised us we would celebrate Christmas in England." Then it was New Year's Day. . . . "And if they want us to go on much beyond that, we'll hang up. One can't do this sort of work indefinitely."

'No matter what the future might hold, they forgot their worries at that Christmas dinner. Eliane, self-assured, enjoyed herself without relaxing her self-control. But Arthur caused us, by his drinking, some moments of anxiety. "More, more," he cried, and I saw that his hand was shaking alarmingly. "Don't let him have any more," I said to his neighbour at table who, when Arthur was about to pour himself another glass, called "Stop!" Arthur took no notice, and my friend turned to me and said: "Obviously, he does not understand English!"

'When we rose from the table, we turned on the gramophone to dance. Arthur was very shaky on his legs. Eliane and I watched him anxiously. He danced with Andrea, and said to her: "You want to know who I am, Andrea; very well, I will tell you. . . ." We listened, appalled. "I am . . . a *réfractaire*," he said, turning to us with a little mocking smile, to show us that he was not being indiscreet!

'The night never ended. . . . They drank, and danced, until morning. I went to bed, and, when I awakened, found they were still up.

They told me they had made a pact, which they had inscribed under the pedestal of one of my sculptured busts. A pact which was, like their wits, a little cloudy. . . . The Pact of Five. Five months, five days after the Liberation, at five o'clock in the afternoon, at 5 rue de l'Université in Paris, 5ème *arrondissement*, the five signatories, Arthur, Eliane, my son-in-law Raymond, my daughter Renée, and I, were to meet together, and swear to attend come what might.

'I know that my daughter, who refused to give up hope in spite of everything, was the only one to keep the rendezvous.

'But that Christmas celebration, crazy, a little too emotional, was nothing but the reaction of nerves strained to their utmost, for alarms were perpetual.

'The house was full of revolvers, rifles, enough to sustain a siege. Arthur said, "If they come to arrest us, we must collect a good bag before we are overcome. You must put yourself at one window, I'll stand at another, and we'll fire together."

'Then, one day, when Arthur was making a radio transmission and I was on guard by the fireplace, I sensed that someone was standing nearby. I turned, and saw in the shadow of the french windows a German N.C.O. One could hear, outside, the sound of the radio. Quickly, I warned Arthur and then went out, not through the french windows, but through the front door; this gave me a little more time. "What are you doing there?" I called to the N.C.O. He did not understand French, but gazing at the house, he said, "*Prima, Madame, Prima.*" I realized then that he was admiring its construction and to put him off the scent I said: "The view is even more *prima*, come and have a look," and I led him on to the terrace. Not knowing if he had heard the Morse or not, and fearing he might realize I was attempting to draw him away from the house, I led him back to it. He questioned me in German. I grasped that he was asking me if I lived alone. Yes. No one else here? No.

' "Won't you come in?" I asked him, in order to set his mind quite at rest, and he entered the house. At that moment, a noise made him jump almost out of his skin. Arthur, unnerved by my temerity, had dropped his suitcase on the first floor! "But there is someone else," the German said to me. "Yes, my son." "How old?" "Twenty." "A student?" "Yes." "Why isn't he at college?" "Ill," I replied—one of the few words of German I knew. And, as it was impossible to conceal his presence any longer I called, "Arthur, Arthur, come down."

'Arthur had told me a hundred times, "If I find myself in the presence of Germans, I shall forget how to speak French."

'He was obliged to come downstairs; he was very pale, and the German could well believe that he was ill. I pressed hospitality to the point of offering him a glass of schnaps, which he drank with pleasure. The unfortunate thing was that he came back—every day, to drink another glass! Arthur said, "It's madness, no good will come of it", but, as it happened, it did not bring us misfortune. On the contrary, these visits saved us, as will be seen later.'

Madame Régis told me that this schnaps was, in fact, an ersatz drink of a peculiarly repellent nature. She made wine at La Cavalière, and also distilled some spirit from the grape—pretty raw stuff. One day, a shopkeeper offered her a small bottle, and told her if she added 2 kilos of sugar to a certain measure of spirit, and then poured in the contents of this bottle she would produce a delicious liqueur, just like Benedictine. Two kilos of sugar were, at that time, infinitely precious; nevertheless, Madame Régis, who, as I discovered myself, is generosity itself, decided to sacrifice them in order to have a good liqueur to offer her friends.

The resulting liquid was an abomination; quite undrinkable. It was this that she offered, with such success, to the German N.C.O. So the two kilos of sugar were not sacrificed in vain.

'On another occasion, while Arthur was transmitting, we suddenly saw a group of German soldiers, carrying rifles and machine guns. . . . Being unable to proceed any further up the road, they turned round the house and encircled us. At that moment Arthur went to the window, and thought that the manoeuvre was for our benefit. "Get your revolver," he said to me. But, convinced that it was nothing more than a mistake, I walked out of the house and spoke, jokingly, to the officer in charge. "Didn't you realize that this road led only to a private property?" I asked him. He saluted me, and simply replied: "Pardon, excuse, Madame, we make mistake, we do exercise on the hill."

"But this road does not lead to the hill, and you've damaged my stone steps with your wagons."

"Madame, tomorrow I see they are mended."

"No, it would be better to put up some barbed wire to block the road. Just send me some barbed wire."

"Very well, Madame, again, excuses, Madame."

'He really had something, that man!'

It is necessary to emphasize the extraordinary courage and presence of mind, shown by Madame Régis in these encounters. She expanded on them, to me, in fits of laughter. 'I told the chap that I didn't want his damned soldiery messing about the house for days on end, making more damage as they repaired the first instalment. All I wanted was barbed wire to keep them out in future,' she said. I would add that the German officer delivered the barbed wire according to her instructions, and it is still in use at La Cavalière.

'Another alarm took place in St. Raphaël. Eliane and Jean Hellet had been to the Haut-Var to collect arms dropped by parachute. I waited for them in a café near the station, where they were to pick me up before returning to La Cavalière. There were some Germans in this café, and at one moment I took out my powder compact in order to make up my face. The lid of this compact was made from a compass, and as I opened it my arm was seized by a German N.C.O., who said: Follow me. He then led me to a German military post. At first, I did not know what it was all about, and I said to myself: "This is it—we're discovered; perhaps they stopped the lorry, and now they are taking me to join the others."

'I was immediately interrogated by an officer: "Madame, why do you carry a compass? Don't you know it is forbidden?" "No, I had no idea, and in any case, my compass is really a powder compact," and I showed it to him. He seemed very interested. "All the same, why put a compass on a powder box?" he asked. "Because it's pretty, and I adore compasses. I have them in trinkets, as belt buckles, and so on." "Me too," he replied, very amiably. "I adore compasses, and I collect them; I'll show you one that was taken from a Russian soldier in Russia."

'He became so amiable that I did not dare walk out, but I was on tenterhooks. Jean Hellet and Eliane, if they did not find me at the rendezvous, would search around for me, and if they discovered I was in a German military post they would not know what to do next! I tried to bring the conversation to an end, but the officer would show me his compass, and then said: "Madame, we have the same tastes, the French and the Germans were intended to understand each other. Why don't you like us?"

'That would have taken rather too long to explain. I said simply: "My grandfather was an officer, and he was killed in '70. My father was an officer, and he was killed in '14. My brother is now a prisoner. That prevents me from liking you."

He did not persist further. He stood up and faced me, and saluted pompously. I arrived at the café just in time to catch Eliane and Jean Hellet, who were on the point of leaving with their load.

'Oh, those journeys with arms, with dynamite on board, along German-patrolled roads! How many times, in order to be agreeable, we added to our cargo some German soldiers whom we picked up by the roadside, and who little knew what manner of goods they were escorting!

'One day, in order to change the place of transmission, we carried the radio suitcase to Roquebrune, to the home of Jean Hellet. He lived in a house in the village square, a house that had been divided in two, one half of which was then occupied by a German military unit. The communicating doors between the two parts of the house had not been blocked up! It was an idea that had no excuse but its folly!

'To cap everything, Jean Hellet asked his neighbours, as a personal favour, to help erect an aerial between his roof and theirs! That was really the limit—to make the Germans work for London!

'Arthur then tried out his wireless in the architect's studio where Jean Hellet worked; Jean himself muffled the telltale sound of morse by playing his violin, while his secretary, more dead than alive, not liking this sort of joke, tapped feverishly at his typewriter, which had been placed next to the door that led to the German half of the house. This sort of thing could not be repeated too often, and the secretary gave notice as soon as the first trial had ended.

'Moreover, Arthur preferred to be at La Cavalière where, apart from some false alarms, months had passed without incident.

'Eliane, at Marseilles, had many more anxieties. A town was always more dangerous. I remember that one day she lost her handbag, containing a great sum of money, her false identity cards, her ration book, the keys to the rue Mérentié. In order that she might get into the flat, Jean Hellet acted as a step ladder. The windows were open, and by standing on his shoulders Eliane was able to get into her lodgings. She was also worried about the people who lived next door; and, indeed, they were not good security risks.

'Henry was unable, as a result of illness, to eat farinaceous foods; he had to have meat, eggs, butter, sugar, things that were particularly difficult to get hold of, and he was obliged to deal in the black-market. It was a character called "Peg-leg Henry", a member of a Marseillaise gang, who had light fingers, who got the things he needed—and made

him pay through the nose for them too. But the presence in the group of "Peg-leg Henry", though essential, was worrying. It was he who, involuntarily, brought about the drama of which he also was a victim.

'All this time, the direction-finding cars based on Anthéor were drawing nearer, little by little, to Roquebrune; we were warned that a radio-car had been seen on the road only a few miles from the house. One day it even stopped at the road which branched in one way to La Garrigue [the only house to stand anywhere near the villa of Madame Régis] and in the other to La Cavalière. A man, standing on the chassis, was taking bearings. They went up to La Garrigue, and took possession of it, for the house was empty. They did not come to La Cavalière—we discovered later that Sergeant X, the German of the glass of schnaps, had reported it to be a "friendly" house, occupied only by "a widow and her invalid son"!

'Above us, on a hill that dominated ours, rose the monastery des Camaldules. Two old priests, one of them an Italian, and an Italian servant were the only inhabitants. The Germans did not hesitate for a moment: it was from the monastery that the radio transmissions were being made. They took the wretched Italian servant to Draguignan, and tortured him for eight days. With an electric lamp burning into his eyes they yelled: "Admit that it was from your place that the radio transmitted to London!"

'After eight days of this, the poor creature confessed to anything they asked of him, but it meant nothing, and the Germans realized that they had made a mistake.

'With danger imminent, we had to stop transmitting for the time being from La Cavalière. It was at the end of January that Eliane, on the instructions of Henry, began searching for four flats, in four different corners of Marseilles, from which to restart our transmissions. Arthur was not happy about it. I promised him that when the alarm was over, he could come back home with me. He said to me: "In a town, too many dangers surround every step." One might think that he had a presentiment. Things went pretty well to begin with, and in spite of all difficulties, transmissions were made regularly; nevertheless, it was decided that we should move back to La Cavalière at the beginning of March. Then another alarm in our district forced us to postpone the date for a few days.

'We were summoned, Jean Hellet and me, to Marseilles, to the rue Mérentié, on Saturday, 27 March, to discuss whether or not to restart transmissions in Var. The truck had already made rather too

many journeys to Marseilles, and we decided to go by train. Our rendezvous in the rue Mérentié was in the evening, and we left St. Raphaël that morning. It was the day when Carnoules was bombed, causing considerable damage to the station and the permanent way. The train in which we were travelling was six hours late. It was 9 p.m. when we pulled into the station of St. Charles in Marseilles. We had to go on to Aix to spend the night at the house of Maryse Hilsz, and as the last train for Aix left only a few minutes after our arrival at St. Charles, we decided to give up the idea of going to the rue Mérentié, and to go instead first to Aix. It was this delay, and this decision, that enabled us to escape the Gestapo!

'The next day was a Sunday, and we approached Henry's flat, as always, with circumspection. Jean Hellet was worried because the shutters were closed. He told me to wait in the vicinity, and not to go up to the flat, while he went to try and find out what, if anything, had happened from a barber who had a shop beneath the flat of our friends.

'There was a customer already in the shop; when he had been dealt with, the barber put Jean Hellet in his armchair, tied a towel round his neck, covered his face with shaving soap, held the razor to his throat, and said: "You were one of the gang upstairs too. I remember you." (Jean Hellet wore a beard of such original cut as to enable him easily to be remembered.) "It was you who helped the little lady to climb in at the window one day." (This was the occasion when Eliane had lost her keys.) "I know you well."

'A tricky moment. Jean Hellet denied all, but found himself impeded by the razor at his throat. So he snatched up a water carafe that happened to lie to hand, in order to take a swipe at his adversary. "Look here," the barber said, "I'm only telling you this to help you. The Gestapo have been upstairs since yesterday. They've arrested everyone. They've been firing off revolvers; it was a massacre!"' (He was an Italian, comments Madame Régis.)

'Was he to be believed or not? It was impossible to judge, but if he was, it would explain the closed shutters, and as for the arrests, that must be true. Jean Hellet let himself be shaved, and then joined me outside, saying, "They've all been arrested, Eliane, Henry, Arthur and all the French people who called on them last night. We must let London know."

'I do not know exactly how this was done, but we did know that our friends were in the hands of the enemy, and we were frantic.

Arthur had said often, "I wake up each morning saying, I won't talk, I won't talk, to train myself. Anyway, I have the means whereby to kill myself, rather than talk. . . ." Poor Arthur, poor Eliane and Henry, suffering the horrors that we knew about only too well. We were sick . . . and we could do nothing for them.

'When I got back to La Cavalière I wanted to stay there, but those around me told me I must go, and hide. And it was in Paris, and later in the house of my daughter in Aisne, that I spent those weeks of anguish and of silence. All that we knew was that our friends had been taken to Les Baumettes. Later, a man named Villevicille, who had been arrested also, and who came back from Germany, told us that he had denied being in contact with the English, and that when he was confronted with them in prison, he really did not know them. Their faces were so swollen and deformed by the application of electric current, they were truly unrecognizable.

'Very much later we learned that they had been taken from Les Baumettes to Fresnes, and, in May 1944, to concentration camps in Germany.'

This news came in August 1946, in the form of a letter to Jean Hellet from Madame Chaix-Bryan, who had herself received a letter from Albert Browne-Bartroli, enclosing a copy of the War Office letter informing Captain Plewman of the death of his wife.

'Henry was interned in Hamburg. I have never heard anything more about him. It was said that the camp was heavily bombed.

'As for Arthur, a Chaplain who returned from Buchenwald told us that he had been executed, with thirty-seven of his comrades, before the camp was liberated by the Allies. He was hanged by the feet, and it was not until the third day that a revolver shot put an end to his atrocious suffering.

'For us, after the landing of Allied troops, which took place before our eyes, the first moments of exultation passed, and we sought, by every means in our power, to discover why the arrests had been made, and to gain news of our friends. Jean Hellet obtained a warrant which enabled him to make fruitful investigations which he pursued courageously, in spite of receiving many threatening letters.

'The perpetrator of the fatal denunciation had been a Frenchman. We found him in American employment. This man had worked for the Gestapo, and had brought about the deaths of twenty French people and the imprisonment of many more. He had a mistress who was, alas, also the mistress of "Peg-leg Henry". It was through her that

the *réseau* was penetrated and poor "Peg-leg", who happened to be in the flat in the rue Mérentié when the Gestapo arrived, was also arrested and died at Buchenwald. The French traitor was executed at Marseilles.

'Maryse Hilsz was killed in an air crash in January 1946.

'Jean Hellet was also killed in an air crash, in March 1949.'

So ran Madame Régis's story. In conversation, she expanded greatly on the events following the Liberation, and the efforts she and Jean Hellet had made to track down the betrayer, and to discover the fate of Eliane, Arthur and Henry.

I asked why Jean Hellet had received threatening letters, and she explained that the traitor had been a member of the Marseilles underworld, and his cronies had sought to deflect M. Hellet from his purpose by threatening his life if he continued his investigations. M. Hellet had, Madame Régis told me, said that nothing in his life had called for more courage than to go into the witness box, and give evidence against the traitor, when he stood his trial.

It had also, she told me, been necessary to exert great pressure on the barber, whose shop was beneath the flat in the rue Mérentié, in order to persuade him to give evidence; vital evidence, for he alone could give testimony that the traitor, Bousquet, had accompanied the Gestapo when they raided the flat. The barber had seen him arrive with the Germans.

Next day, Madame Régis drove me to the rue Mérentié. It lies in an undistinguished quarter of Marseilles, a short, unexceptional street of low, grey stone houses shaded by trees. We stood outside, looking upwards at the window of the flat that Eliane had occupied, and a Frenchwoman, standing at the door of the neighbouring house, stared at us curiously. Madame Régis, anxious that our interest should not be misinterpreted, said: I am showing this lady the house where some friends of the Resistance lived.

At once the Frenchwoman replied: Oh, yes, the English; they were all arrested next door, in 1944.

Then we went into the house, stood on the uneven stone flags, looked at the dingy grey walls. It was here, I said to myself, as I had said so many times. . . . The past became quick then, and real. Once again tragedy showed itself against a poor and shabby backcloth.

Madame Régis said, tentatively: 'I wonder if we could have a look at the flat. . . .'

At that moment a woman, with some children, came in through the street door. Again, Madame Régis explained, and again the Frenchwoman replied: 'Oh yes, those English officers, they had a radio in the first-floor flat, the Gestapo took them in the spring of 1944.'

Then she said: 'Monsieur Untel has it now; he is out.'

So we left. Madame Régis did not dare approach the barber, who still plied his trade. 'The last time I saw him, it was as a gangster,' she said. 'We went to his shop, and browbeat him into promising to give evidence against Bousquet.'

At home, Madame Régis showed me the few papers she had that she thought might interest me. Amongst them were letters she had received from the father of Arthur Steel, asking if she could give him any news of his son. When she received those letters, Madame Régis knew, from the Chaplain who had been at Buchenwald, that Arthur Steel was dead. She could not understand why the War Office, which must surely also have this information, had not passed it to Mr. Steel.

She felt she could not break the news, without warning, in a letter. Instead she sent a reply-paid telegram, saying she was in Paris, and could Mr. Steel come and see her? She added, in order to prepare the ground a little, that she had no good news. . . .

Mr. Steel wrote to say he was unable to come to Paris; and that was the last Madame Régis heard from him. It was the last she was to hear from anyone connected with her time in the Resistance. . . .

She showed me, too, the poverty-stricken little letter she had received from the H.Q. of S.O.E., to which she had, in the summer of 1945, written offering indefinite hospitality at her villa in Var to one of its officers who might have returned from imprisonment and be in need of peace, quiet, sun and a little cherishing. . . .

The reply thanked her for this offer, but made it clear that it would not be accepted. Travel permits, it pointed out, were not easily obtained.

These few brief letters, and then silence: absolute and complete until I broke it, more than eleven years later.

When I got home, I at once consulted *The White Rabbit*, the now famous story of Wing-Commander Yeo-Thomas, G.C., and his work in the Resistance. I had learnt from Madame Régis that Arthur Steel had been imprisoned at Buchenwald, and the number, thirty-seven,

mentioned by the Chaplain as having been executed, struck a chord of memory. It had, I thought, been with a party numbering thirty-seven that Yeo-Thomas had travelled from Fresnes to Germany.

So it was; *The White Rabbit* told me that Captain Steel had indeed travelled with Yeo-Thomas to Germany, and he had been executed on 9 September 1944, with a number of comrades from S.O.E., amongst them Captain Garry, alias Phono, of the *réseau* Prosper, who was thought by London to have arranged the reception of Madeleine Damerment, and Robert Benoist, who had dropped with Albert Browne-Bartoli.

According to *The White Rabbit*, these men were hanged by hooks in the wall of the crematorium, and allowed to perish by slow strangulation.

Yeo-Thomas returned from Buchenwald to London in May 1945; so did at least two other officers of S.O.E. It is indeed odd that the father of Arthur Steel had no news of his son as late as the autumn of that year and had in desperation written to Madame Régis to ask if she could tell him anything. It should be stressed that it was the War Office itself that gave Mr. Steel the name and address of Madame Régis. Had the War Office bothered to contact this woman whom it knew to have been in close touch with Captain Steel, she could have reported his death; assuming, of course, that this had not already been done by the officers who returned from Buchenwald.

From Marseilles I flew home by way of Paris, and had the opportunity to meet once again M. Weil, the head of the *réseau* Robin for whom Sonia Olschanesky had worked. I met also his secretary, who had, throughout the Occupation, engaged in clandestine work with M. Weil.

From him, I discovered that the father of Sonia Olschanesky was dead. One brother had been taken as a prisoner to Germany, and had never been seen again. Another survived.

I asked—I had forgotten this point when I had met M. Weil the previous July—whether Sonia had been a dancer. He took another photograph from his note-case, and handed it to me. It showed her wearing the classic white costume of the *corps de ballet*: she had, he told me, been a ballet dancer. That proved, beyond a shadow of doubt, that the Sonia Olschanesky of the Karlsruhe prison records was the Sonia Olschanesky of the S.O.E. *réseau* Robin. The last detail of the records tallied.

Then his secretary showed me the great file containing carbons of the letters she had written, in the months and years following the Liberation, in an attempt to trace Sonia and ascertain her fate. Every clue, no matter how tenuous, every possible contact, no matter how remote, had been examined; had produced nothing. It seemed all the more inexplicable that the British authorities, presented with the records of Karlsruhe when investigating the fate of the murdered women of Natzweiler, had taken no action in connection with Sonia Olschanesky.

I asked M. Weil, and his secretary, if they could add anything to the story I had been told in July about the 'double' who had lured Sonia to her arrest. They could remember only that he had come from St. Quentin, and that he had, when he first arrived in Paris, aroused some suspicions. Sonia should never have gone to her second rendezvous; her youth, her inexperience, had caused her to be rash.

The secretary told me she owed her life, in all probability, to the fact that M. Weil's mother had died shortly before Sonia went to the fatal rendezvous; M. Weil was, himself, taking refuge in Switzerland then. His secretary had travelled into the country to break the news to his sister, and was not thus present at the meeting between Sonia and the 'double' as she would otherwise have been.

This rendezvous was the Café Soleil d'Or in the Place de la Trinité; later that day, I happened to pass it, and saw it a dull, drab little place.

I had, then, seen the spot where five of these women had been arrested; the saw-mill at Clairvaux where Diana Rowden was taken, the Café Mas where Vera Leigh was arrested, the Café Moulin Brulé in St. Quentin where the Germans found Yolande Beekman, the rue Mérentié where Eliane Plewman had been betrayed and now, the Café Soleil d'Or. I was not sure where Andrée Borrell had been arrested; nor had I identified the landing ground where Madeleine Damerment fell into enemy hands. But the picture was clear enough; the little café, the lonely saw-mill, the shabby street in Marseilles; they were all part of the fabric of France, woven into the lives of ordinary people, leading ordinary lives. And those who still survived remembered the splendour that had once, briefly, touched them.

There was, then, no more to be learnt about Sonia Olschanesky and the reason for her arrest. For myself, I felt it was significant that the double agent who had led her to arrest had come from St. Quentin. St. Quentin was a highly suspicious centre. I knew that a German

called Placke, employed by the Sicherheitsdienst, had operated for some time a *réseau* consisting of genuine French resisters in St. Quentin. This *réseau* had maintained normal contact with London, where it was accepted as being perfectly genuine, arms were dropped to it, and agents and messages exchanged in what was thought to be the normal fashion.

This St. Quentin *réseau* was believed by London to have been organized by two Canadians, McAlister and Pickersgill, who had in fact been arrested with Pierre Culioli, of the *réseau* Prosper, a day or two after they had parachuted into France in June 1943. Both, incidentally, suffered the same terrible death as Arthur Steel in Buchenwald, and were murdered on the same day.

Moreover, Sonia Olschanesky was captured shortly after Yolande Beekman and Guy Bieler were arrested in St. Quentin. This, too, linked her closely with a *réseau* known to have been penetrated by the Germans. It is entirely credible, even logical, that she should have been imprisoned with other captured members of these *réseaux*, and should have died with them.

When I left M. Weil that warm day in February, I felt that the time had come when I could bring this book to an end. The end of the quest would, I knew, elude me always: this was a story that could have no final ending, for always there would be more to learn.

But I had accomplished, in outline, what I had set out to do: to trace the story of seven women who had, one day in the early summer of 1944, travelled from Fresnes to Karlsruhe. My impulse had been the belief that we were forgetting too much, too quickly; my researches had profoundly buttressed that belief. We were forgetting not only the scourge that threatened to annihilate us, and with us those qualities that raise man above the status of a beast; we were forgetting, too, the immense sacrifices that were made to save us from that annihilation. We had relinquished, too lightly, the burden of our debt; we had let the straps slip from our shoulders, the weight slide to the floor, had straightened, gratefully, our backs, and kicked the load into the corner.

Yet the dead must wait on the living, and time must have an end. . . .

I was thinking of these matters as I walked past a newspaper office in a street off the boulevards; outside this office there were wall-boards on which current editions of the journal it published had been pasted. General Speidel had recently been appointed to his N.A.T.O.

command, and, as I passed, a cartoon caught my eye. It was of a figure representing a man of the Resistance tied to a stake. A German general, his face thrust close to that of the man about to be executed, was speaking. And the caption read: 'If it's any consolation to you, your son will be under my orders.'

The wheel had, I thought, come full cycle, and it was as well that the dead were dead, and could never again walk the streets of Paris.

EPILOGUE

IN THE PROLOGUE to this book, I have referred to the emotions that were with me as I wrote it, of the conclusions I had reached. Now, at the end, I would wish to re-emphasize certain points, for I do not wish to be misunderstood.

It is very certain that the men and women who volunteered for service with S.O.E. did so with their eyes fully opened to the dangers involved. They accepted these, and they would not have asked that those who directed their work in the field should have allowed consciousness of those dangers to sway their judgment. The agent knew that he was, in the final analysis, expendable; but he had, surely, reason to expect that he should be expended to good purpose, that his death, if necessary, should have been occasioned only by a calculated risk. And he might have expected that, the war over and the need for silence past, the residue he left in death should have been dealt with competently.

This failure of S.O.E. to deal with the aftermath, to seek truth in relation to the activities of those who died, had many strange consequences. One of the most startling may be seen in the citation of the George Cross awarded posthumously to Violette Szabo eighteen months after the war had ended, more than two years after the Liberation of that part of France in which she was captured. A large part of that citation was false, giving in detail a description of events that never in fact took place; it was also, moreover, extremely misleading as to the length of her service in France.

Three G.Cs. were awarded to women who served with French Section, S.O.E. It is strange that the citations of two of them should contain inaccuracies—those of Violette Szabo and Noor Inayat Khan.

I have referred to Noor Inayat Khan's citation on page 43. I would add here that it also stated she was the 'first agent to be sent to Germany', in November 1943. According to the evidence of Dr. Guérisset, both Captain Stonehouse and Captain Sheppard, of S.O.E., had been sent to Mauthausen Concentration Camp before that date.

It is also rather curious that Noor Inayat Khan's G.C. was gazetted so very late. Mrs. Churchill's was awarded in August 1946; that of Violette Szabo on 17 December of the same year (according to Mr. Tickell, the day after Mrs. Churchill stepped into the witness box to give evidence for the prosecution at the Ravensbruck War Crimes Trial); that of Noor was not gazetted until 5 April 1949.

I have been assured that all investigations concerning the activities, imprisonment and deaths of captured agents had ceased long before the spring of 1949; S.O.E. itself had of course been disbanded years previously. One wonders what information came to light four years after the war ended in Europe, and nearly five years after the Liberation of Paris, to persuade authority thus belatedly that Noor Inayat Khan had deserved a G.C.

The delay certainly had one highly unfortunate result. As Jean Overton Fuller has recorded: 'On 29 April 1946 a letter was sent from the War Office to Mrs. Inayat Khan, informing her that her daughter Noor had met her death by lethal injection at Natzweiler Concentration Camp on 6 July 1944. The trial of the Natzweiler camp staff, which began exactly a month later, at Wuppertal, on 29 May 1946, attracted considerable publicity in the Press. It was alleged by one witness (though not proven) that the girls were not entirely dead when put into the incinerator, and one newspaper carried headlines: Four British Women Burned Alive. . . . Mrs. Inayat Khan, having received this letter from the War Office, could not but doubt that her daughter was one of the girls referred to, and collapsed into sobbing. . . .'

In fact, at the Wuppertal Trial, only three girls were identified by name: Diana Rowden, Andrée Borrell and Vera Leigh. Referring to the fourth woman murdered with them, Vera Atkins said in the witness box her 'identity I was and am unable to ascertain'.

This strongly reinforces my view that the request made to the Press not to report the names of the murdered women was entirely misconceived. Had they been published, the relations of Noor Inayat Khan would at once have realized that she was *not* one of them. It is curious that the War Office did not hasten to rectify its mistake, and write again to Mrs. Inayat Khan; she might then have been spared a certain measure of her anguish.

In fact, no correction was ever made. It was not until, in April 1949, the citation to the George Cross was published, stating, as was true, that Noor had been shot at Dachau on 12 September 1944, that it was

known that the official letter reporting her death at Natzweiler in July 1944 was erroneous.

In the case of Violette Szabo I do not, I insist, imply that she may not have richly deserved a George Cross. I say, merely, that her citation, written when the true circumstances of her arrest could have been ascertained, was in considerable part fictitious. It is not the case that the facts were such that they could not be checked with living witnesses; they simply were not.

Many other facts were left unchecked; and a sad wilderness of weeds has grown up in consequence. In writing this story I have desired only, so far as it lay in my power, to tell the truth; for the truth, here, is indeed far stranger than any fiction and, more important, it is invested with infinitely greater majesty.

It may be held that, in presenting the story of these seven women, I have allowed my own emotions to cloud, in some measure, their achievement; that by revealing something of the true nature of the background against which they worked, I have laid unclean hands upon their memory.

I cannot think that this is so. These women worked, as it happened, against a background in France that was riddled with treachery, cowardice and cupidity; that they, and many like them, withstood every form of pressure, moral and physical, maintaining their own integrity and courage intact until death, does not diminish their stature, but enhances it.

They would not ask our pity; but they died that compassion might not vanish from the world, and it is right that their story should be written not by the cold hand of history, but by the living impulse of remembered grief.

It was they who gave, and they alone who have the right to be magnanimous. We are the debtors, and we have no power to close the account, to rule a line across the page, and shut the ledger.

One thing only is within our compass, that may help to redress the balance. We can remember some words written long ago, and in another war, that have a terrible, personal application:

*'Thou, therefore, for whom they died,
Seek not thine own. . . .'*

APPENDIX I

SONIA OLSCHANESKY

IT MAY, I fear, have occurred to the reader that the story of Sonia Olschanesky, her relations, and the decisions I may have taken in the matter of passing on to them my information about her death, are left very much up in the air in the main text of this book.

Events that took place in the late spring of 1958 now enable me to add the truth about this in the form of an appendix, written after the book had gone to press.

The facts are these. When I was satisfied that Sonia had, beyond all possible doubt, been identified as the fourth woman of Natzweiler—as were M. Weil and his secretary, Madame Geraud, who was also closely concerned—the decision had to be made whether or not her mother, who was still living, should be informed.

I was told that Madame Olschanesky had had a tragic life. Her husband had died in 1942, one son had been deported at the same time as Sonia and, as in her case also, no further news had been received of him, a second son had been taken prisoner in 1940 and remained a P.O.W. throughout the war. I was also told that Madame Olschanesky cherished hopes that Sonia might still be alive, possibly behind the Iron Curtain. A number of prison camps were in 1945 over-run by the Russians, and a girl with a Russian name, and of Russian parentage, might conceivably have been transported to the U.S.S.R. and detained there.

In all these circumstances, the considered advice, given in good faith by those who were in a position to judge, was that it would be kindest to tell Madame Olschanesky nothing. She could not read English, was excessively unlikely ever to be told of this book, and it was felt my best course was not to disturb her with my news.

I was not entirely satisfied that this advice was, in fact, sound; but I felt that I had no option but to accept it, for I did not know Madame Olschanesky and those who gave it did. I would not, I felt, be justified in ignoring advice offered with such evident integrity and in the best interests of Madame Olschanesky herself by people who were her friends and concerned only for her peace of mind.

So I took no further steps. I finished this book, tying the loose ends as neatly as I could, it was accepted for publication, and sent to the printer.

In, however, the spring of that year, the *Sunday Pictorial* bought the serial rights. Audrey Whiting handled the job of preparing suitable extracts for serialization.

With a photographer, she went to France and Germany to obtain photographs with which to illustrate them; and, of course, she asked about Madame Olschanesky. The Editor wanted a photograph of her; could this be arranged?

I explained the situation. We debated whether or not it would be possible to approach Madame Olschanesky without revealing the full truth; we debated, also, whether serialization in the *Pictorial*, and the world syndication that would follow, might not in any case lead to Madame Olschanesky learning the truth about her daughter. The *Pictorial*, I would stress, was prepared to defer absolutely to my wishes in this; but I came to the conclusion that in these new circumstances it would in any case be best to see Madame Olschanesky, and test the ground.

We therefore contacted Philippe de Vomécourt, one of the great figures of French Section, S.O.E., and now actively concerned with *Libre Résistance*, the *Amicale* of all S.O.E. *réseaux*; I had met him previously in Paris, and had been fascinated by his reminiscences.

M. de Vomécourt, and M. Badaire, also an honorary official of *Libre Résistance*, telephoned Madame Olschanesky—who lives not very far from Paris—and reported back to us that they thought no harm could possibly come of visiting her; and that she was perfectly prepared to receive us.

Unfortunately, at that time I had been in bed for many months following an injury to my spine; it was quite impossible for me to go to Paris, and the need was for someone to go at once.

Audrey Whiting therefore went, briefed fully by me. We agreed that Madame Olschanesky should in the first place be told only that the *Pictorial* was planning a series on women who had fought in the Resistance; whether or not she should be told more would depend on the circumstances, and her own reactions. I told Audrey that my only concern was that we should do what seemed best in the interests of Madame Olschanesky; with this she entirely agreed.

When she came back from Paris, she had a deeply moving, and distressing story to tell me. As she had entered the room Madame

Olschanesky had asked: Have you any news of Sonia, Mademoiselle?

Audrey, who speaks excellent French, avoided a direct answer. But it very soon became abundantly clear that Madame Olschanesky was, in fact, anxious to know whatever truth there was to be known. As Audrey was leaving, she said: 'If there is any news, I beg you to tell me. I have been left unknowing for too long. . . .'

She also revealed a dreadful story. Her husband had died in 1942, one son, as I have said, was a P.O.W., another had been arrested by the Gestapo at the same time as Sonia; when the war ended, she was in extremely difficult financial circumstances and, also, as a result of her anguish of mind, both physically and mentally exhausted.

She had, moreover, been unable to prove that Sonia had worked for French Section, S.O.E., and that she had died as a result of that service. Consequently, five years elapsed before she was able to obtain even a tiny pension. Had Sonia worked for a de Gaulle *réseau*, it might have been different; but those who worked for the British were treated shabbily by the French Government and they were entirely abandoned by the British Government.

Madame Olschanesky paid, therefore, extremely dear for the fact that Sonia had not been identified as the fourth woman of Natzweiler. Had action been taken on the evidence of the Karlsruhe records in 1946, she would have been spared a very great deal of suffering.

When she was told of the surviving son, who worked in Paris, Audrey realised that he was the person who could best give the news of Natzweiler to his mother. She went, therefore, at once to see him, told him the whole story, and he agreed without hesitation that his mother should be told, that it would be a relief to her to know, at long last, the truth, and that it was for him to tell her. This he did.

There is one, last, addition to be made. Three days ago Madame Guépin telephoned, out of the blue; she was on her first visit to London and, she told me, could not leave without seeing me. . . . We had met only once, three years previously, and this touched me deeply. Whatever might be thought in some official circles of my activities in the pursuit of truth, it was clear that Madame Guépin gave me her wholehearted support.

By a fortunate chance, I was at home when she telephoned, and free; I told her to get in a taxi, and within twenty minutes she was with me. She stayed three hours and I wished she could have stayed three days; I enjoyed every minute we spent together.

We talked, of course, about S.O.E.; and I told her I had identified

the fourth woman of Natzweiler, that her name was Sonia Olschanesky.

'Sonia,' said Madame Guépin. 'So it was she . . . after all these years, she was the fourth woman who died with Andrée. It was Sonia. . . .'

It had never occurred to me that Madame Guépin might have known Sonia; I had never thought to tell her. Now, belatedly, I discovered that Madame Guépin had known her well; had worked in close contact with her.

I listened a trifle ruefully; the interlocking of all those *réseaux* was even more clearly revealed. Madame Guépin had known the Prosper *réseau*, the *réseau* of Bieler in St. Quentin, Yolande Beekman, Cordelette, she had known the *réseau* of Trotobas in Lille, she had known the *réseau* Robin, to which Sonia belonged, had known Weil, Madame Geraud; she had known Frager, and his vast *réseau*, Jean-Marie.

No one could, or would, deny the superb courage of those who served in these *réseaux*. But human flesh is made quick by sensitive nerves; and nerves can be tortured until a point is reached where the flesh dominates even the most valiant spirit.

It was inevitable that, with so many *réseaux* so closely connected, the members of each knowing each other so well, that sooner or later someone would be captured, tortured, would speak; and, having spoken, condemn not only those of his own *réseau*, but those of many others as well.

The pattern now was clear. They had all known each other, Suttill, Borrel, Leigh, Frager, Beekman, Bieler, Cordelette, Trotobas, Garry, Benoist, Antheline, Guépin, Darling, Norman, Olschanesky, Jones; and the tentacles of their knowing had spread far across France, to Marseilles to ensnare Eliane Plewman, to the Jura to clutch Diana Rowden, to the skies, to seize Madeleine Damerment.

The net that had enclosed them all in life was to encircle them in death; only M. Cordelette and Madame Guépin were to wriggle almost destroyed and yet alive still from its meshes.

Madame Guépin told me that she had weighed, when she came back from Ravensbruck, less than 80 lb. She rested, as she put it, for three weeks only; then she embarked on a task that was to occupy her for three years, that of securing, as best she could, justice for those who survived, honourable recognition for those who died.

With a few others she toiled, unsupported, at the task of tracing those who had worked for S.O.E., making lists, checking claims,

proving death in the service of France, in brief, sorting out a most hideous and deplorable confusion.

Madame Guépin was wholly without bitterness, for she is a very great woman. That the British Government had entirely abandoned those who had served it in French Section, S.O.E., she said was 'normal'. With that I cannot agree. But, she said, to be treated almost as traitors by our own Government, that was hard. We were told we had been agents for a foreign country, we had not worked for France. We—who were the most ardent Gaullistes! We worked only for France, to drive out the Germans; we needed Allies; the British were our Allies, we worked with them. But we worked only for France, Madame Nicholas, for France. To be told, at the end, we were traitors; that was hard.

Hard, I think, beyond all endurance; hard as the cruellest sword thrust of well-tempered steel, hard as the stone that stood above the graves of comrades who had not lived to see their 'treachery' restore to France her freedom.

There had been no help anywhere, no money; for a time a small British Mission did exist in Paris; soon it announced, briefly, that it was leaving. It packed up and went, with a casual wave of the hand. After that, silence. Madame Guépin and her few comrades worked on, alone.

It is, I believe, the case that our authorities did at least send such official documents as they had that might have helped in identifying those who had worked for British *réseaux*; these fell into the hands of certain French authorities who, in an insanity of jealousy and spite, held fast to them. They never reached Madame Guépin and her friends, who were unaware that they existed.

The intrigues in France were known to our authorities, and, indeed, the situation was extremely complicated and full of dangerous implication; it should be stressed moreover that decisions in this matter must have been taken at a high level, almost certainly in Cabinet; beyond question they were far beyond the influence of those who had worked in London for S.O.E. But the decision must nevertheless have been made that the British Government would not lift a hand to help those who had worked in British-controlled *réseaux* in France.

Madame Guépin may, from her largeness of heart, forgive us, say that what we did was normal. I think it was abnormal; and, as this is a democracy and what is done by the British Government is done in my name—as it is in yours—I am deeply ashamed that we abandoned,

without a word, without a care, those French people who had fought with us in France during four years of Occupation.

That the behaviour of the French Government was shameful does not lessen our guilt, it increases it. In 1946, the French were, emotionally, unhinged. The sufferings of four years came to a head, broke at the moment of Liberation, and pus flowed into the blood stream and carried its venom to the brain. For a time, there was a madness; and, in that madness, great patriots like Madame Guépin suffered as did the most miserable traitors.

But we—we should have seen clearly where our honour and our duty lay. We cannot now excuse ourselves that protocol prevented our interference in the internal affairs of France. Men and women recruited into British Resistance groups remained, always, our affair; we had accepted their help when it suited our purpose and it was not for us to abandon them when that purpose had been fulfilled.

That our purpose was also the Liberation of France, the defeat of the German armed services, the utter destruction of the filth of Nazism is irrelevant. We used French men and women in S.O.E., and we should have helped such as remained, when we no longer needed to call upon their valour.

Madame Guépin is, today, a great and good Frenchwoman and she is also a great and good friend of Britain. That we have still her friendship, and of those like her, is the measure of their charity and grace, not of our worthiness.

Our treatment of those who served France by serving the British Resistance groups in France was shameful. No one fought, even feebly, on the safe battlefield of paper for those who had fought so valiantly the most dangerous of wars. We abandoned them utterly; we should be humble that they have not, long since, abandoned us.

AIR MINISTRY RECORDS OF SPECIAL DUTIES SQUADRONS

IN THE SPRING of 1958, a friend, who knew I was interested in anything relating to S.O.E., asked if I had read a book by Jerrard Tickell—*Moon Squadrons*. This was she said the story of the Special Duties Squadrons of the R.A.F. (Nos. 138 and 161) whose task it had been to maintain liaison with the Resistance movements of Europe.

I had not read or, indeed, heard of the book and I was grateful to my friend for lending me her copy. It had, I saw, been first published in the autumn of 1956, at a time when I was in hospital and not, therefore, following the publication of new books with normal attention.

In his Preface, Mr. Tickell thanked the Air Ministry for having placed at his disposal such records as existed of Squadrons 138 and 161; Well, fancy, I said to myself. . . .

I had, quite early in my quest, considered the matter of these records; but as all official sources were, it was by then clear, firmly closed, I decided it would be a waste of time, paper and postage to write to the Air Ministry and ask for access.

However, here was evidence that the archives had recently been opened to Mr. Tickell, and though the precedent set by the War Office in placing files at his disposal when writing *Odette* had not, in my case, been followed, I felt it possible that the Air Ministry might react differently. After all, I said to myself, Whitehall cannot make a habit of giving Mr. Tickell facilities it denies to others; so on 14 March I wrote to the Chief Information Officer, setting out my request.

When four weeks had passed without reply, I began to brood. Some 30 months earlier, the Air Ministry had not answered letters I had written seeking information about Diana Rowden; this, I had been told, was an Inexplicable Mistake. Could this new silence portend Inexplicable Mistake too? Or was it thought that not to answer at all was the first, obvious, opening gambit in reply to a potentially tiresome move?

On 11 April I wrote again, saying I had hoped that I might perhaps

by then have had answer to my letter of 14 March. A reply was sent to that on 15 April, in which it was said that my original letter could not be traced.

I wrote again on 17 April, repeating the essence of my original letter. On 29 April I got an answer, saying that the records would not provide me with the information I required, as these records gave details only of actual dropping operations, and did not mention the identities of people concerned. It was regretted that the Air Ministry was unable to help me. . . .

Next day I replied, polite, I hope, but firm. I felt it unreasonable that the Air Vice-Marshal who had signed the letter should have told me that the records would not contain the information I was seeking, as I had not told him what this was. I had, in fact, asked only for access in connection with a book I was writing. Moreover, I knew, of course, that aircrew did not know the names of the agents they were dropping and that these would not be entered in their operational reports. I just wanted access similar to that given Mr. Tickell—could I have it?

Thank God we have an Air Force. On 14 May, exactly two months after I had first written to the Air Ministry, I got a letter saying that I would be granted the facilities I requested.

Unfortunately, this last letter arrived the day before I was due to set out for Ireland which was annoying, as the main text of this book was already with the printer. Any information derived from the Records would, in any case, have to be added as an Appendix and even in that respect, time was pressing. However, nothing could be done at the moment and, in fact, a month passed before I was able to take advantage of the facilities offered me. When at last the day came when I was free to visit the Air Ministry my long-frustrated interest was operating at maximum pressure.

The records in fact proved fascinating for, contrary to expectation, the R.A.F. had used the same code names as had French Section, S.O.B., and the records were, therefore, of far more value than I had anticipated. For example, when a drop was to be made to a group under Harry Rée (Stockbroker), the entry in the R.A.F. Operational Report was also under the code name Stockbroker. As I knew the code names of all the people I was concerned with, I was able to follow the various air drops without difficulty.

I turned first, of course, to the night of 29 February/1 March 1944, the night on which Madeleine Damerment, Anthelme, and Lionel

Lee had been dropped to a German reception committee. There it was: Squadron 161, based on Tempsford. Operation Phono 4 (Phono, it will be remembered, was the code name of Henri Garry, who was thought in London to be arranging the reception; he had in fact been arrested in October, 1943. See page 66). The aircraft, a Halifax, had taken off at 20.14 hours; German Intelligence was therefore very accurate, for it had known that the aircraft was due to leave London around 21.00 hours (see also page 66). The Halifax was over the dropping area at 22.45 hours (General Oberg and Colonel Knochen, high officers of the Sicherheitsdienst in Paris, had arranged that the German reception committee should take up stations at 21.15 hours) and released three agents, eight containers and six packages.

I then went back through the records to see how many drops had been made to Phono (Henri Garry) *after* his arrest in October 1943; I traced eleven such Phono operations in all but God had, undoubtedly, been on our side in this for several had, by reason of weather, mechanical failure, or other Act of God, proved abortive. But on the night of 8/9 February one operation on which agents were dropped was, alas, successfully completed. . . . I wish it were possible to identify those unfortunate bodies.

There was an element of macabre humour also in the fact that a pilot had reported, in respect of these Phono operations, that the 'lights were exceptionally good'. As the Germans had themselves placed them this, of course, is not surprising. One wonders if, in Baker Street, reports that lights were 'exceptionally good' ever aroused suspicion that there might be a sinister reason for this?

I then went through the records and was able to trace the operations on which Diana Rowden, Yolande Beekman, Eliane Plewman, Vera Leigh and Andrée Borrel were infiltrated. Eliane and Andrée dropped by parachute; the others were landed from a Lysander. Nothing exceptional was reported by the pilots who undertook these operations.

Neither was anything exceptional reported of the Lysander operations on the night of 15/16 November 1943, when 'Maugenet' was landed to a German reception committee (see pages 38 and 164).

Two other points struck me. First, there was evidence of the immense pains taken by the R.A.F. to trace its missing aircrew when conditions made that possible. The records contained details of the investigations made in respect of a Halifax that had crashed in France when engaged on Special Duty. In the fullness of time, an investigation team traced it to a remote village, and established the identity of the

crew, members of which had been buried in a communal grave subsequently carefully maintained by the local people.

I could not but compare the detailed and meticulous care given by the R.A.F. to the task of tracing missing aircrew with that bestowed by S.O.E. on the job of clearing up its own, particular aftermath.

I was interested also that there was one exception made to what I had understood had been an inviolable rule: that the names of agents appeared nowhere in R.A.F. operational records, and were indeed unknown to pilots and crews. I found the name of Churchill.

In a spirit, I admit, of purely vulgar curiosity, I had turned up the record for 23/24 March 1943, the day when, I knew, Peter Churchill and Henri Frager had left for England. This particular Lysander pickup was easily traced as I knew, also, that Francis Cammaerts had been landed by the plane that took off with Churchill and Frager, and I knew that the code name of Cammaerts had been Jockey.

There it was: Operation Jockey, and I was startled to read that the pilot had put in his report 'whole operation admirably organized by CHURCHILL'. In point of fact, I think it was not. The Lysander landed near Compiègne, whereas Peter Churchill's sphere of operations lay many hundreds of miles to the south, around Annecy. He arrived at the field where the pickup was to take place only a few hours before the plane arrived, so the 'admirable organization' of the reception committee cannot, it would seem, have been the personal achievement of Peter Churchill.

But how odd that this one deviation from the strict rule of anonymity should have been made.

APPENDIX 3

FRENCH SECTION, S.O.E.

Agents with their aliases

AS AUTHORITY REFUSED me any information, even on the most straightforward matters, I do not know what rank these men and women may have ultimately achieved nor, in all cases, what decorations they received. It seems to me, therefore, preferable to give none, rather than be inexact.

Those marked * are known by me to have lost their lives; only Harry Rée escaped detection. Should anyone be able to give me news of Lionel Lee, Marcel Clech or Sydney Jones, I would be grateful.

Not all the cover names listed here do, in fact, appear in the text. But as I hope this book may result in further information reaching me, it seems wise to include all the names known to me that may, on occasion, have been used by the agents in question. This should make their identification more complete.

*Anthelme (first name unknown to me)	Antoine Joseph Dumontet Renaud Bricklayer Rattier
*Beekman, Yolande	Mariette Yvonne de Chauvigny
*Bicler, Guy	Guy Musician
*Borrel, Andrée	Denise Denise Urbain Monique Whitebeam

Clech, Marcel (captured November 1943; fate unknown to me)	Bastien
*Damerment, Madeleine	Martine Martine Dussautoy Martine Duchâteau Solange Dancer Paul Jean Marie Donkeyman Phono Cinema Madeleine Jeanne-Marie Regnier Nurse
*Frager, Henri	
*Garry, Henri	
*Inayat Khan, Noor	
Jones, Sydney (captured November 1943; fate unknown to me)	Felix Elic
Lee, Lionel (captured February 1944; fate un- known to me)	Jacques Lionel Heriat Daks Mechanic Simone Suzanne Chavanne Almoner Archambault Eliane Prunier Gaby Dean Stockbroker César Henri Paulette Marcelle Juliette Rondeau Chaplain Henri Henri Truchot Monk
*Leigh, Vera	
*Norman, Gilbert	
*Plewman, Eliane	
Rée, Harry	
*Rowden, Diana	
*Skepper, Charles	

*Steel, Arthur

Arthur Saulnier

*Suttill, Francis

Waiter

Prosper

François

Physician

*Young, John

Gabriel

Judge

In addition, of another Service:
Guérisse, Dr. Albert

Pat

Lt.-Com. O'Leary

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